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A Bear in the Mountains
Russian Policy in the Caucasus Region

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A Bear in the Mountains
Russian Policy in the Caucasus Region

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Abstract

A Bear in the Mountains
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The Caucasus region is an integral part of Russian history, politics, and culture, both in the arenas of internal and external policy. Throughout the centuries, Russia has spent much blood and treasure to maintain its influence in this vital region. The purpose of this thesis is to highlight the Russian government's efforts to maintain political, economic, and cultural influence in the Caucasus and how those efforts led Russia into two Chechen wars and a brief but consequential armed conflict with Georgia. This thesis paper will briefly examine the history of Russian conquest in the Caucasus and how the region became so important to Russia, politically, culturally, and economically. The paper will also explore the effects that the fall of the Soviet Union had on relations between the Russian central government and the North Caucasus republics and how the conditions that the break up created led to the first Chechen War. The work will also examine the causes of the second Chechen War and the role of radical Islam in the conflict between the Russian federal government and rebels in the North Caucasus. This paper will also analyze the possible threats to Russian hegemony in the Caucasus,

including radical Islam, terrorism, and a Georgian government that seems determined to exit Russia's sphere of influence. The work will also analyze the 2008 Russo-Georgian War and how it impacted not just Russo-Georgian relations, but also how it helped define Russia's relationship with the West and its role in world politics. Finally, the thesis will study Russia's future prospects in the region, whether Russian hegemony will remain in the South Caucasus and what should be done to ensure peace and stability in the North Caucasus.

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Introduction and Review of Literature

It is vitally important from the perspective of Moscow's Kremlin to retain a significant level of influence in the Northern Caucasus Republics and to keep the former Soviet states in the Southern Caucasus firmly within its sphere of influence. The Caucasus as a whole is a critical region, both geopolitically and economically for Russia. The Russian need to maintain significant political, economic and social influence in the region led it to pursue two Chechen wars and ultimately to engage in the Russo-Georgian conflict of 2008.

In order to understand the complex relationship between Russia and the Caucasus, we should examine several issues related to this question. First, we need to characterize the historical relationship between Russian and the Caucasus and how the breakup of the Soviet Union affected it. How did Russian policy toward Chechnya ultimately lead to the two Chechen conflicts? What are the threats to Russian control in the region? Did the independence movement in Chechnya in the early 1990s really threaten to start a cascading effect of Russian provinces declaring independence, thus causing Russia to break up as the Soviet Union did? Was the true cause of the Russo-Georgian conflict a need on Russia's part to maintain its influence over an independent former Soviet republic? Finally, what is the future of Russia's relationship with the Caucasus? Can Moscow coexist with an independent or semi-autonomous Chechnya, and can it tolerate Georgia as a member of NATO and the EU? A number of sources in this field address the questions of Russia's relationship with the Caucasus republics and how the Kremlin's policies affect the region. In examining these questions, this report is principally concerned with Russian policy and their direct effects on the conflicts in the region.

Therefore, analyses on the conduct of the conflicts are of secondary interest and are only included where they are applicable to answering the main questions of this paper.

How did Russian policy ultimately lead to two destructive and expensive military actions in Chechnya and what were its intentions there? How did Russia's desire to keep the Southern Caucasus within its sphere of influence color its policy toward Georgia as it charted a course for rapid westernization and NATO membership? Was it merely a dispute between Russia and Georgia or were Russia's actions aimed at the West as well? What role did the separatist movements in North Ossetia and Abkhazia play in the conflict and how did they relate Russia's broader foreign policy objectives? These are some of the main questions I hope to resolve in this thesis.

Chapter One will provide a historical background of Russia's involvement in the Caucasus. This will be a concise history from the time of Peter the Great, when the first Russian military expeditions entered the region, through the imperial expansions of the 18th and 19th Centuries. It will continue with the Russian revolution of 1917 and the beginning of the Soviet Union. It will briefly cover the effects of Stalin's mass deportations and executions and will conclude with the period toward the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

In Chapter Two, I will examine the circumstances surrounding the first Chechen War and the Yeltsin administration's role in it. This chapter will examine the question of whether President Yeltsin's policies toward Chechnya instigated the drive for independence and ultimately led to the two wars. It will also explore why Yeltsin insisted on keeping Chechnya within the Russian Federation even after he publicly declared that the federation republics should be as autonomous as they cared to be. This chapter will also consider the question of whether or not the Yeltsin administration's attempts to keep Chechnya close to Moscow ultimately drove it further away. Finally,

this chapter will compare the first and the second Chechen conflicts and identify their converging and diverging factors. This question will examine the impact of radical Islamic movements in Chechnya and the North Caucasus and examine the role of terrorism in both conflicts.

Chapter Three will examine the threats to Russian control of the region. Who or what could pose a challenge to Russian hegemony in the area? This chapter will analyze what it would cost Russia to lose control of part of the region. It will also study how, if at all, the Chechen drive for independence threatened to start a movement for other federation republics to establish their own independence.

Chapter Four will examine the causes of the 2008 Russo-Georgian conflict and their relation to the goal of Russian hegemony in the region. This chapter will explore whether Russia truly instigated the conflict (as seems to be the consensus) or did Georgia intentionally provoke a war to garner international support and underscore Georgia's need to enter into a Western alliance? It will also discuss the separatist movements in Abkhazia and North Ossetia and whether Russia manipulated them to for its own purposes. This chapter will also look at Russia's passport distribution policy in the two separatist districts and discuss whether the pretext of protecting Russian citizens in Abkhazia and North Ossetia was a legitimate reason for an invasion or if it masked an ulterior motive; namely, an attempt to prevent Georgia from joining NATO and keep it within the Russian sphere of influence.

The fifth and final chapter will discuss the future of Russia in the Caucasus. This chapter will examine what would have to be done to ensure that the region becomes stable, viable and cooperative with Moscow. It will also look at the prospect of independence for the North Caucasus republics. If Chechnya or other North Caucasus republics push hard enough for independence, would Russia be able to keep them in the

federation? If not, could Russia live with independent or autonomous republics within its borders and under what conditions? Finally the end chapter will examine if it is really possible for Georgia to exit Russia's sphere of influence. If this were the case, could Moscow live with this even if it would mean having a NATO member state along Russia's Caucasus border?

To address the research questions of this study, I selected the sources for this area of inquiry because I believe they cover a broad base of scholarship on the subject and provide a balanced range of perspectives, both in English and in Russian. The sources include: Anatol Lieven's *Chechnya; Tombstone of Russian Power*, Matthew Evangelista's *The Chechen Wars*, Robert Seely's *The Russo Chechen Conflict 1800-2000; A Deadly Embrace,* James Hughe's *Chechnya; From Nationalism to Jihad,* Anna Politkovskaya's *A Dirty War*, Ronald D. Asmus' *A Little War that Shook the World,* Svante E. Cornell's and Frederick Starr's *The Guns of August 2008*, Volkhonsky and Mukhanov's *Россия на Кавказе; Пять веков истории*.

I also consulted sources from journals such as *Foreign Policy*, Russia's *Независимая газета*, *Кавказский узел*, *The Eurasia Daily Monitor*, *Kavkaz Center*, *Radio Free Europe* and the Russian government publication, *International Affairs*.

Lieven, Anatol. 1998. <u>Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power.</u> New Haven and London. Yale University Press.

Lieven explores the factors leading up to the first Chechen conflict and the eventual causes for Russia's military intervention. He explores many aspects of the period immediately following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and how they tied into the Chechen conflict. The author points out that while the Chechen question was not straightforward and easily solved and there was no easy reconciliation between Chechens' desire for independence and Russian interests, the war was nevertheless the

end product of a series of failed policies and destructive political power struggles. Lieven's perspective was particularly insightful because it provided ample background on the social, economic and political issues of the Soviet and post-Soviet era that led to the troubles in the North Caucasus. This book was published in 1998, so it does not cover the second Chechen War.

Evangelista, Matthew. 2002. <u>The Chechen Wars.</u> Washington D.C. Brookings Institution Press.

Evangelista examines Russia's involvement with the North Caucasus in general and with Chechnya in particular. Like Lieven, the author deals with the question of how Russia's internal policies ultimately led to the 1994 military intervention. Evangelista's work also expands on the knowledge brought to us by Lieven by covering the second Chechen War as well. Evangelista provides a historical background for the subject and discusses the role that territorial and ethnic politics played in the conflict. He also highlights the Yeltsin Administration's attitudes and policies surrounding this issue. But perhaps the main contribution of this book is that it discusses and repudiates the contemporary notion that the secession of Chechnya from Russia would cause a domino effect of separations that would ultimately lead to a break-up of the Russian Federation.

Seely, Robert. 2001. <u>The Russo-Chechen conflict 1800-2000, A Deadly Embrace.</u> New York, London. Frank Cass Publishers.

Seely's work deals with over two hundred years of Russia's involvement in the Caucasus, much of it in a state of conflict. In this book, Seely provides an in depth look at the history of Chechen resistance to Russian rule and how it factored into the first Chechen conflict. He also describes how the Tsarist policy of ensuring Russian rule over these provinces carried over into the Soviet era and even survived into the post-Soviet era. Seely broaches the subject of Islamic fundamentalism in Chechnya and how Russian

rule may have given rise to some of the earliest of such movements as a unifying vehicle for rebellion against the Russian rulers.

Politkovskaya, Anna. 2001. A Dirty War. London. The Harvill Press.

This book is collection of journal articles written by the late Russian journalist, Anna Politkovskaya. It provides a great deal of insight about the conduct of the second war in Chechnya from the journalist's perspective, which is notably anti-Putin. This source is particularly valuable because it primarily comprises eye-witness accounts and interviews and the author had first-hand knowledge of many of the events recorded in the anthology. Even though the book does not deal specifically with the causes of the second Chechen War, it elucidates the policies and attitudes of the Putin administration during this period. This book is a scathing criticism of the Putin's government and his policies as well as the separatist movement under Dudayev. It highlights the ineptitude, corruption and disregard for humanity that led to such wide-spread human suffering. It should be noted that this work is highly subjective and should be balanced with other sources.

Asmus, Ronald. 2010. A Little War that Shook the World. New York. Palgrave MacMillan.

Asmus provides an analysis of the 2008 Russo-Georgian conflict, its causes, and its consequences. In this work, he provides a detailed account of the events immediately leading up to the war and the war itself. This book is valuable because it provides insight into Russian foreign policy concerning its near abroad and illustrates the impact that Russian-NATO relations had on its policy toward Georgia. Asmus makes a compelling case that Russia manipulated the separatist movements in Abkhazia and North Ossetia and used them not just to halt NATO expansion into the Caucasus, but to respond to NATO and the West for its role in Kosovo's independence. This book takes the

Caucasus question out of isolation and places it into the broader context of Russia's position in European power politics.

Cornell, Svante E. & Starr, Frederick. 2009. The Guns of August 2008. Armonk. M.E. Sharpe Inc.

This is a collection of essays from various authors concerning the Russo-Georgian conflict of 2008. This work was compiled, in part, to correct the deficiency in authoritative, objective information on this subject that was caused by a dearth of qualified Western journalists on the scene, allowing Russia to have a monopoly over the flow of information at the time. Furthermore, the editors assert that while much attention was focused on the war and its consequences, not enough attention was given to its antecedent events, thus widening the gap in understanding. Therefore, much of the work is focused on the chaotic years of the early 1990s and how they shaped Georgia's relationship with its separatist regions and Russia. The essays in this book are assembled from a broad range of points of view including Russian, American, Georgian and European sources. The authors' backgrounds span from academia to diplomatic and military circles to professional journalists.

Volkhonsky, M.A. and Mukhanov, V.M. 2009. Россия На Кавказе; Пять веков истории. Moscow. Ministry of the Interior of Russia.

This book is a history of Russian involvement the Caucasus. The book covers five centuries of Russian history in the region. The authors show how the region has been integral to the development of the Russian state over the centuries and how it continues to play a role in Russia's economy and politics. The authors cover Russian imperial expansion in the region, the Soviet period and end the book with an account of the 2008 Russo-Georgian conflict. This book was valuable not just as a history source,

but as a publication of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), it provided valuable insight into the Russian point of view.

Hughes, James. 2007. Chechnya, From Nationalism to Jihad. Philadelphia. The University of Pennsylvania Press.

This book examines the impact of radical Islamism on the second Chechen war. Hughes argues that conditions following the first Chechen war led to a growing trend of religious radicalization in Chechnya. This trend, in turn, led to a series of escalating terrorist attacks on Russian soil that would ultimately provide the pretext for Vladimir Putin to order a second incursion into Chechnya. The book also elucidates how Vladimir Putin related the war in Chechnya to the Western struggle against terrorism and how that impacted Russia's relations with the West. Hughes' work is enlightening because it places the second Chechen war in the context of the Global War on Terror.

Parfitt, Tom. 2011. The Islamic Republic of Chechnya. Foreign Policy.

This article highlights how Chechnya is changing and what it might become under its current president, Kadyrov, and Putin. Parfitt points out that Grozny has come a long way since its almost total destruction in 2004, but there are signs that the Chechnya under Kadyrov has been becoming more and more "Islamized", i.e., that Islamic religious law has seen an increasing codification into civil and criminal law in what is supposed to be a secular democracy. This article is important in that it highlights the direction that Chechnya is taking and indicates what the future state of Chechnya might be.

Parfitt, Tom. 2011. A Fear of Three Letters. Foreign Policy.

This article details the brutal anti-guerilla campaigns undertaken by the FSB as the guerilla movement has spilled from Chechnya into Ingushetia. In this account, Parfitt points out that in the patriarchal Ingushetian society, rough treatment of villagers by the FSB only serves to enrage the relatives. This treatment, in turn, causes more people to

support the insurgency. Parfitt's article serves as a good indicator of the state of affairs in Ingushetia and may shed light on how the situation could develop in the future.

Editorial. 2011. Islam Inflamed. The Economist.

The author of this article from April of 2011 contends that there exists a growing Islamic radicalization in the Northern Caucasus; especially in Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia. According to the article this is mainly due to Moscow's failure to provide critical infrastructure and to implement policies of good governance. It claims that Moscow's policies have been the use of military and police force and throwing money into the region. It also seeks to explain why those policies have, in a large part, failed to bring about lasting peace and prosperity, mainly because brute force drives citizens to radicalism and money simply disappears due to corruption. Like the previous articles, it serves as an indicator of the direction that the region is taking.

Kireyev, Khasan. 2010. The North Caucasus and Geopolitical Interests of World Powers. International Affairs, Volume 56, No. 1.

In this article from the Russian publication, *International Affairs*, Kireyev contends that the major Western powers have been at work to drive Russia out of the Caucasus, thereby depriving it of access to the region's resources and to the Caspian and Black Seas in an effort to advance their own geopolitical power. The article accuses the West of fomenting separatist movements in the Northern Caucasus and of undermining its influence in the Southern Caucasus. The article itself takes on a paranoid, jingoistic and hawkish tone and Kireyev levels accusations without evidence to back them up. However, it provides a valuable perspective of the issues in the Caucasus region from a Russian point of view. It is especially helpful in understanding why the Russian government remains so adamantly opposed to Georgia joining NATO.

Mukhin, Vladimir. 2012. Дагестан все больше напоминает сектор Газа. Независимая Газета.

This article from Russia's "Independent Newspaper" describes the dire state of affairs in Dagestan as of June 2012, a situation that required the transfer of MVD troops from Chechnya to Dagestan. Specifically, Mukhin details the decline of security and the rise in terrorist attacks and criminal gang activity. His point is that the situation in Dagestan now resembles the situation in the Gaza strip. This article was valuable in shedding light on the current situation in Dagestan. More importantly, it reflects what the Russian media is reporting and shows the situation as viewed by the Russian public.

Gantimurova, Tatiana. 2012. Локшина: вместо поиска убийц Натальи Эстемировой власти занимаются преследованием правозащитников. Кавказский Узел.

This article primarily discusses the targeting of human rights advocates and sympathetic journalists. The author asserts that the government, instead of investigating and prosecuting these incidents, harasses the activists and journalists. One of her primary examples is the journalist, Natalia Estimirova, who was abducted and murdered three years ago. Authorities consider it a closed case and blame it on Chechen insurgents. However, the case has not been brought to trial and the author and groups such as Human Rights Watch do not find this to be a plausible explanation. However, the Estimirova case is indicative of a broader problem; that the situation is becoming very difficult for human rights advocates and journalists in the places like Chechnya and Dagestan. They are attacked with relative impunity while the authorities do little to protect them or investigate the attacks. This is another article that infers the current state of affairs in the North Caucasus. However, this is also a publication that tends to weight its opinions against Moscow.

Chapter One

"What strength! I thought. Man has conquered everything, destroyed millions of plants, but still this one will not give in."

-Leo Tolstoy, *Hadji Murat.*

With this metaphor, Tolstoy was referring to one man in particular, Hadji Murat, but I believe he was also using the metaphor to represent the spirit of the Caucasus people. This is a metaphor that even still has meaning today. Since the first military expeditions into the region, many in the Caucasus have resisted Russian rule. This spirit of resistance has manifested itself in many uprisings throughout Russian and Soviet history, in the two Chechen wars and even in Georgia's course of course toward Westernization and NATO membership.

In order to understand more fully the role that Russia plays in the Caucasus region, as well as the region's importance to Russia, we should briefly examine its history from first contact with Russia up through the post-Soviet period.

The Caucasus mountain range is situated at the cross roads between modern-day Russia, Turkey, Iran and the Middle East. Situated as it is on this junction, it has historically been the bridge between several key regions; Russia and Eastern Europe, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean world, the Caspian Sea and Central Asia, Persia and the Middle Eastern lands. Since prehistoric times, the area has become home to a very diverse array of ethnic, linguistic and religious groups. This diversity is mainly a result of the high mountains and large valleys, which offered protection from hostile tribes and people, but it also served to isolate groups from one another. The result was a dispersal of multiple and disparate groups. The region eventually became home to forty ethnic

groups and thirty languages as well as Christian, Muslim, Mazdeanist and animist religions (Seely, 2001, 5).

Ancient Russians had had contact with inhabitants of the Caucasus since the tenth century (Volkhonsky/Mukhanov, 2009, 6). However, the Russian Empire first started making forays into the Caucasus region in the sixteenth century. Though this period did not yield any lasting settlements, it set the stage for further, more lasting expansion. The Russian Empire really began making headway into the Caucasus in the early eighteenth century using a combination of "settlement, acquisition and seizure" (Seely, 2001, 22). This process lasted until the early nineteenth century. It was during this period that the Russian Empire established itself in the Caucasus and began to push out the Persian and Ottoman Empires (Seely, 2001, 22). For Russia and the Caucasus, this was a period of expansion, new settlements and war with the local inhabitants. Peter the Great's armies first pushed into Dagestan and modern day Azerbaijan, gaining control of Baku and Derbent and Cossacks were settled along the Terek River (Seely, 2001, 23). Peter's immediate successor, Empress Anne, was not interested in territorial expansion and did not continue Peter's efforts in the region (Seely, 2001, 23). It was Catherine II who continued the expansion into the Caucasus, establishing a military highway and a series of forts, including a base at Mozdok, which would grow into "a key military base for later Russian conquests" (Seely, 2001, 23). It was also during this period that Vladikavkaz was established (Seely, 2001, 23).

When we examine the history of the Caucasus, we will see that violent struggle in there is not merely a product of post-Soviet ethnic and political strife. Eighteenth and nineteenth century Russian imperial expansion into the Caucasus was largely marked by violence and bloodshed as the local inhabitants resisted and rebelled against Russian rule. This response was especially true in the North Caucasus, where a spirit of independence,

tribalism and Islam proved to be a volatile mixture and would become hazardous to any occupying army. The early period of expansion gave rise to cause and movements that still carry ramifications to this day. For instance, Russian expansion into the Caucasus may have given rise to the earliest Islamic fundamentalist movements (Seely, 2001, 31). Sheikh Mansur and Imam Shamil (from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, respectively) both used the Islamic religion as a means of gaining support and momentum for their cause (Seely, 2001, 31). Sheikh Mansur was Chechen warrior and spiritual leader (Ibid). Originally a shepherd's son, he became an imam as an adult (Seely, 2001, 31). He led a five year revolt against Russian rule between 1785 and 1790 (Seely, 2001, 31). Repeated attempts by Russia to capture or kill Mansur ended in failure. On one occasion, Mansur's fighters defeated a superior force led by Prince Potemkin (Seely, 2001, 31). His initial success against the Russian forces caused other Caucasus groups to join forces with him (Seely, 2001, 31). In 1790, Russian forces stormed Mansur's base and captured him, effectively ending the rebellion. He died in Russian captivity a few years later (Seely, 2001, 31). Sheikh Mansur was significant because he effectively unified the Chechen people and, until the emergence of Shamil, was viewed (even in Europe) as the symbol of the mountain people's independence and resistance to Russian expansion (Seely, 2001, 31). Like Mansur, Imam Shamil also came from humble beginnings. He took part in incursions against Russian forces and built up his reputation as a spiritual leader. As an imam, he created a resistance movement that fought for thirty years against a force of two hundred thousand Russian soldiers (Seely, 2001, 41). During his thirty year resistance, Shamil cultivated a mythical image as a military and spiritual leader who could both command fighters and dispense wisdom and justice to his people. He was even believed to be able to commune with the Prophet Mohammed (Seely, 2001, 41). Like his predecessor, he was also captured and eventually died in Russian captivity.

As Robert Seely wrote in *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800-200; A Deadly Embrace*, (2001) both of these leaders "were proponents of using the Koran both as an ideological weapon to underpin opposition to expansionist Christian empires, and as a means of purifying, unifying and strengthening Islamic societies" (21). These Islamic movements would also prove to be of lasting significance for both the Soviet empire and Russia in the post-Soviet period. In fact, the legacy and image of Shamil as the great religious leader in rebellion against Russia survived well into modern times (Lieven, 1998, 304).

The period between the reign of Catherine II and the beginning of the twentieth century was a time of near constant unrest and violence for the Northern and Eastern Caucasus (Lieven, 1998, 306-307). Sheikh Mansur led a bloody "insurgent" war effort against the Russian forces that lasted for years (Lieven, 1998, 306). He brought a devastating defeat against Russian forces in 1785. Unable to unite the Chechens, Dagestanis, Kumyks and Kabardins under him, however, he could not bring about a lasting and meaningful victory over the Russians (Lieven, 1998, 306). He died in Russian captivity in 1791 (Lieven, 1998, 306). From this time until 1818, there was a relative "uneasy peace" that was intermittently disturbed by raids and retaliations on both sides (Lieven, 1998, 306). The First Great Patriotic War against Napoleon caused Russia to turn its attention away from the mountain rebels and toward defense of the homeland. With the 1816 victory over France however, came the appointment of General Alexei Yermolov as the Commander-in-Chief for the Caucasus region. He was charged with finally bringing the rebellions tribes to heel (Lieven, 1998, 306). His campaign was marked by brutality and excessive violence often directed against civilians (Lieven, 1998, 306). His efforts focused on destroying their economy. Crops were destroyed and villages were burned. The Chechens were forced back into less hospitable mountain terrain, forcing them back into a more primitive way of life and ensuring their animosity

toward the Russians (Evangelista, 2002, 13). Yermolov's brutality in pursuing his mission led to uprisings and ultimately to a thirty year conflict between Russian forces and the followers of Imam Shamil (Lieven, 1998, 306). Ironically, a statue of Yermolov was erected in Grozny, where it remained until its destruction in 1991 (Lieven, 1998, 307). Despite the fact that he and his followers held out so long against overwhelming force, Shamil's main legacy may be that it was he who introduced government and state institutions to Chechnya through a system of local governors and Sharia Law (Lieven, 1998, 309). This innovation may have set the precedent that many modern Chechens are seeking to emulate. Why did the Russians bother with this protracted and expensive war? The answer is rooted in the geography of the region. Russia needed to subdue Chechnya and Dagestan in order to keep the highway open between Russia and the South Caucasus. This region was also necessary as a buttress against the Ottoman and British Empires (Lieven, 1998, 313-314). Similarly, in the more modern Caucasus conflicts, geography would be a key factor in determining Russia's persistence in subduing the regions. Access to the Caspian oil fields, the oil pipelines from Baku and a buffer zone between Russia and NATO are just some of the reasons that the region is so geographically important to Russia.

Indeed the Chechen wars of the post-Soviet period bore many similarities to the conflicts of the nineteenth century that produced Hadji Murat and Shamil. During this period, the Russian army experienced crushing and humiliating defeats, protracted expeditions and clashed with an "insurgency" that was both formidable and elusive. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Russian forces made numerous tactical blunders and battlefield errors. Local insurgents often ambushed Russian forces in the same places over and over again. Similar to modern times, the conflicts were costly in terms of blood and treasure and victory proved to be elusive (Seely, 2001, 20-

21). As Robert Seely points out, "In every case quick victory proved an illusion and the legacy of bitterness was passed from one generation of mountain people to the next." (Seely, 2001, 20-21).

Also similar to the more modern conflicts, the Russian imperial government sought out allies amongst the locals, thus dividing the opposition (or at least taking advantage of divisions amongst the local tribes) (Seely, 2001, 21). The end of the twentieth century would see a hauntingly similar phenomenon play out as the Yeltsin administration backed the Chechen Provisional Council and made and ill-fated attempt to out-maneuver Khasbulatov, a personal enemy of Yeltsin (Lieven, 1998, 89-91). This policy of "divide and rule" may well have been the root cause of many of the bitter tribal and ethnic rivalries that are present in the North Caucasus today (Seely, 2001, 21). Imperial Russia would also attempt to mollify the inhabitants of the Caucasus by economic means. Before hostilities began in earnest, the Russian imperial government tried establishing trade with the mountain people as a way of winning influence. However, the effort proved costly and not very effective, as many still looked upon the Russians as outside conquerors who needed to be fought off (Volkhonsky/Mukhanov, 2009, 39-40).

However, not every acquisition of Caucasus land by the Russian Empire was the result of bloodshed and conquest. Georgia, for instance, was annexed by request. Toward the end of the eighteenth century the main Georgian province of Kartlo-Kakheti began seeking Russian protection from other encroaching powers. In 1800, the ruler of the province invited Russia to annex the country; an invitation accepted by Tsar Paul and reconfirmed by Tsar Alexander I (Seely, 2001, 24). The main reason for this acquiescence was both religious and political. Russia was a powerful Orthodox Christian power in the region and Georgia was seeking protection from the Muslim Ottoman and

Persian Empires. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Georgia found itself threatened by the Muslim Persian and Ottoman Empires, for which reason it requested military aid from Russia. Russia sent troops to Georgia's defense on two separate occasions during the eighteenth century (Seely, 2001, 23). In 1795, an attack on Georgia by the Persians caused Russia to declare war in defense of Georgia (Seely, 2001, 24). In 1799, Persia once again threatened the Georgian state, causing King Giorgi to ask Russia to annex the country. Afterwards, Russia assimilated the remaining Georgian provinces, offering them protectorate status as well (Seely, 2001, 24). Russia may have acquired Georgia by peaceful means, but this acquisition led to wars with the Persian and Ottoman Empires. These conflicts, in turn, led to Russia's acquisition of Baku, Derbent (in Dagestan) and Karabakh (Seely, 2001, 24).

The Russian Revolution of 1917 that heralded the end of the Tsarist Empire also brought new hope of independence to people of the Caucasus. It seemed like the new Russian government would adhere to the Marxist/Leninist principle of national self-determination and let them pursue their own course. However, this turned out not to be the case and any independence that the Caucasus republics may have gained was short lived. In effect, the Bolsheviks had merely replaced the old empire of the Tsars with a new communist empire. For instance, Georgia had obtained official independence in 1918, but was re-annexed by the Soviet Union in 1921.

It would be fair to say that the Soviet policies toward the Caucasus region set the stage for much of the current situation in the region for better or for worse. In fact, it was the Soviet government that drew the borders and ethnic boundaries that remain to this day (Asmus, 2010, 54). The Soviet Union drew boundaries that caused ethnic territories to overlap with each other or artificially created minority enclaves in what appeared to be the classic "divide and rule" strategy employed by the Tsars (Seely, 2001, 12). This was

the case with Georgia and Azerbaijan as well as Chechnya, whose borders were manipulated to bring in a large number of ethnic Russians, who had formerly lived to the north of the Chechno-Ingush region (Seely, 2001, 12). Initially, the entire Soviet controlled Caucasus region was consolidated into a single republic, the Transcaucasus Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (TcSFSR), with Tbilisi as its capital (Asmus, 2010, 54-55). The exception was the Chechen-Ingush region, which took on the status of autonomous republic within the Russian Federation (Lieven, 1998, 318). The TcSFSR, however, only lasted about fifteen years. By 1936, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan became separate Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs). Furthermore, in a move that would carry consequences to the present day, the regions of Abkhazia, Adjara and South Ossetia were each given various degrees of autonomy. As Ronald Asmus wrote: "In Georgia, three regions were given special status: Abkhazia as a separate socialist republic unified by treaty with Georgia; Adjara as an autonomous republic; and South Ossetia as an autonomous republic" (55).

Adjara was unique in this arrangement as it was made an autonomous republic in order to accommodate ethnic Georgians who were Muslim (as opposed to Orthodox Christian). This accommodation of a religious group was a rare phenomenon in the Soviet Union (Cornell/Starr/Goltz, 2009, 12-14).

There is debate about whether or not the Soviet government divided up the South Caucasus republics as a means of employing the old Russian imperial principle of "divide and rule" (Asmus, 2010, 55). The fact that various minor states such as Adjara, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh became focal points for separatist conflict and border disputes following the collapse of the Soviet Union may have been evidence that the Soviets employed this policy (Cornell/Starr/Goltz, 2009, 12-14). However, the conflicts that arose during the post-Soviet period may have been merely the

result of the Soviet government's policies concerning "national self-determination" (Cornell/Starr/Goltz, 13)

Joseph Stalin, as Commissar for Nationalities, apparently had his own ideas concerning ethnicities and nationalities and how much autonomy each deserved (Asmus, 2010, 55). Stalin's actions led to certain groups gaining preferential status and eventually building power bases in these areas. As the Soviet Union began to crumble, nationalism became the means to preserve those power bases, which led to the outbreak of the various independence movements (Asmus, 2010, 55). These nationalist independence movements would eventually set into motion a series of events that would bedevil the Russian government in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse and carry consequences lasting to this day.

While the situation in the Soviet South Caucasus remained relatively stable (at least until the late 1980s), the early Soviet relationship with the North Caucasus was much more turbulent. As was the case with Chechnya in particular, there were numerous uprisings and suppressions from 1917 through 1957 (Lieven, 1998, 304). These were considered particularly problematic for the Soviet government. Nationalism was viewed by the Soviets not just as an "ideological threat to communism", but also as a threat to Russian domination and the ruling regime in Moscow (Seely, 2001, 11). Ironically, many in the North Caucasus initially supported the Red Army. However, as the Bolsheviks cracked down on those who insisted on remaining independent and resisted collectivization of their lands, it became apparent that the Soviet government's relationship with the people of the North Caucasus would not be harmonious. In 1929, resistance to collectivization resulted in uprisings, which were brutally suppressed. Uprisings and guerilla activity occurred again in 1935 and 1937, the latter of which was

ended by an NKVD operation that executed thousands of suspected "oppositionists" (Lieven, 1998, 318).

Ethnic cleansing had been part of the Russian strategy for the Caucasus since the days of the Tsars, but it took on new dimensions under the Soviets (Lieven, 1998, 315). During the period of 1943-44, Stalin's mass arrests, executions and deportations claimed the lives of tens of thousands of Soviet citizens who inhabited the Caucasus (Lieven, 1998, 316). This purge was during a drive to deport the Chechen, Ingush, Kalmyk, Karachai and Balkar peoples, ostensibly in retaliation for collaboration with the Germans. It is estimated that at least 78,000 people perished during this time (Lieven, 1998, 319). When transportation conditions proved too difficult for deportation, it was Soviet policy to simply murder the inhabitants of a village in place. Such was the case in the village of Khaibakh, where NKVD Colonel Gveshiani reported that he had "liquidated" over seven hundred inhabitants of the village (Lieven, 1998, 319). It was not until Khrushchev's policy of rehabilitation and de-Stalinization that many Chechens and Dagestanis would be able to return home.

Between the eras of Khrushchev and Perestroika/Glasnost, the Transcaucasus region became an important part of the Soviet economy and society. Chechnya and Baku became the Soviet Union's leading oil producers. The cities of Sochi, Sukhumi and Batumi became premier vacation destination for the elites of Soviet society. The region is no less geopolitically and economically important today than it was during Soviet times. And alas, it may be no less turbulent and bedeviling for Moscow than it had been during the days of Imam Shamil and Hadji Murat. To complicate matters, the three former Soviet republics in the South Caucasus are now sovereign, independent countries, with at least one determined to distance itself from Moscow and become a friend of the West. These are the issues that Moscow now has to deal with in its efforts to maintain its

influence in this vital region. And the Russian government has demonstrated that it will do whatever is necessary to achieve its goals.

Chapter Two

THE FALL

In August of 1991, tanks rolled down the streets of Moscow toward the Kremlin. The communist hardliners' coup to wrest control from Gorbachev and restore the Soviet state to the authoritarianism and power it had before Perestroika and Glasnost had begun. The communist hardliner orchestrators were fed up with Gorbachev's course of reforms and particularly with his acquiescence to more independence for the Baltic States. Gorbachev was placed under house arrest in his dacha in the Crimea as the conspirators made their bid to take over the Soviet government by force. Boris Yeltsin, President of the Russian Federation at the time and a Rival of Gorbachev, sprang into action and organized the resistance that effectively defeated the coup attempt. With the coup defeated, Yeltsin effectively had control of the government and began orchestrate the dissolution of the Soviet Union. On December 25, 1991, Gorbachev gave the West the biggest Christmas present he could offer; He stepped down as president of the USSR, allowing it to completely dissolve. Communism was officially dead in Eastern Europe and the fifteen Soviet republics were independent, sovereign states.

Boris Yeltsin, as president of the Russian Federation set about managing Russia's transition from an authoritarian state with a planned economy to a democratic republic with a market economy. It was during this initial period that the question of autonomy and independence for the various republics arose. The Russian Federation has a peculiar system known as asymmetric federalism, in which the various republics within the federation have differing levels of autonomy and independence from the federal government. As the new Russian state was beginning to form, different territories and

republics appeared to want different degrees of independence. Some wanted only a nominal autonomy, preferring to keep close ties with Moscow, while some wanted total independence. In 1990, Boris Yeltsin even publicly told local officials in Kazan to "take as much autonomy as you can swallow" (Evangelista, 2002, 124). It was during this time that the first seeds of discord may have been sown. Yeltsin was presented with a myriad of demands from territories that wanted varying degrees of autonomy. These demands caused the federal government in 1992 to sign three different federation treaties. Chechnya refused to sign any sort of federation treaty (Seely, 2001, 153). Chechnya, it seemed, wanted total independence. Fearing that Chechen independence might lead to a general unraveling of the Russian Federation just like that of the Soviet Union, Yeltsin was determined not to let Chechnya slip away (Evangelista, 2002, 89-90 and Seely, 2001, 3). Contrary to maintaining its influence on Chechnya, the Yeltsin administration's efforts only pushed Chechnya toward independence and led to a disastrous war that resulted in Moscow losing control of Chechnya and set the stage for another, equally disastrous war.

THE CHECHEN QUESTION

Since the days of Shamil and Hadji Murat, Chechens have viewed themselves as independent and have traditionally rejected Russian rule. Even during the Soviet days, Chechnya enjoyed a measure of unofficial autonomy. As early as the 1970s, the KGB would often allow the local elders to make decisions and punish crimes as they saw fit (Lieven, 1998, 28). The only exceptions were high profile cases, in which serious crimes or prominent figures were involved (Lieven, 1998, 28). Even before the final dissolution of the Soviet Union, Chechnya had tried to assert its independence. During the process of the Soviet Union's dissolution, virtually every republic, including Russia, declared

independence. But Chechnya's case was different. Chechnya was not a Soviet republic; it was a semi-autonomous part of the Russian Federation and the Russian government acted to prevent its breakaway (Seely, 2001, 107-108). The prospect of a general exodus of federation republics precipitated by Chechen independence was something Yeltsin was unwilling to allow on his watch.

THE MAIN ACTORS

The First Chechen War cannot be fully understood without knowing the main actors in its development; for individual personalities ensured that political discord turned into armed conflict as much as anything else. At the forefront of the cast of characters is Boris Yeltsin, the colorful, sometimes bombastic first President of the Russian Federation. Interestingly, one of his main rivals toward the end of the Soviet Unions was Mikhail Gorbachev. This was a rivalry that originated in the days of Perestroika when Yeltsin, as head of the Moscow Communist Party grew bold enough to publicly challenge Gorbachev (Seely, 2001, 97). The Yeltsin/Gorbachev rivalry played a prominent role in one of the earliest Chechen crises of the modern period, the putsch staged by Dzhokar Dudayev and his followers in August of 1991. By November of 1991, Yeltsin ordered troops to be sent into Chechnya (Seely, 2001, 107-108). Gorbachev, as President of the USSR, ordered them back. This act led to accusations that the old Soviet regime was intervening in Russian affairs (Seely, 2001, 107-108). More importantly though, it served to undermine Yeltsin's perceived authority in Chechnya.

The fact that two different leaders were giving conflicting orders to the military indicates the relative chaos that existed in the last days of the Soviet Union and this was probably not lost on the Chechens who resisted central authority (Seely, 2001, 109). The crisis also cost Yeltsin dearly in terms of popularity amongst the Chechens. Yeltsin had

previously enjoyed wide spread support from Chechens and Ingush because they expected more freedom and liberal policies from his leadership. Chechens recounted Soviet atrocities and expressed their desire to be out from under Russia's thumb and for this reason he was initially quite popular with them (Seely, 2001, 109-110). However, the decision to use troops in Chechnya in November, 1991 was met with fierce resistance and demonstrations from many Chechens, likely making Gorbachev's intervention necessary to avert a catastrophe (Seely, 2001, 109-110). Because of his decision to use force, Yeltsin lost the popularity head previously enjoyed among the Chechens (Seely, 2001, 109-110).

Next to Boris Yeltsin, Dzhokar Dudayev was probably the person most responsible for bringing about the first Chechen War. According to Anatol Lieven, author of *Chechnya; Tombstone of Russian Power* (1998), "In seeking the origins of the Chechen War, the Dudayev government's refusal to sign some form of federal or confederal treaty must be judged the most important" (84). His primary goal was to not only create an independent Chechnya, but to be its leader as well. A former Soviet Air Force general who had served in the Estonia, Dudayev took a separatist position that was probably inspired by the Baltic independence movements (Seely, 2001, 91). In 1990, a group of Chechen intellectuals and businessmen formed the All-National Congress of Chechen Peoples (OKChN), a group that wanted to see Chechnya separate from the Russian Federation, and elected Dudayev as its leader (Seely, 2001, 90). Even though he supported Yeltsin during the Soviet coup, his separatist stance drove a wedge between him and the Russian president (Seely, 2001, 110-112). He was also a shrewd politician and organizer who organized his organization with ruthless efficiency and competency and deftly took full advantage of the chaos, indecision and political wrangling in Moscow (Seely, 2001, 110-112).

The third prominent personality in this affair, whose activities contributed to the decision to use force in Chechnya, was the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet and later Speaker of the Russian Parliament, Ruslan Khasbulatov. A Chechen by nationality, he seemed to be keenly interested in unraveling Dudayev's grip on power in Chechnya. His motives for this position are not entirely clear. Perhaps it was because he eventually wanted to become the leader of Chechnya himself. Being that he also had strong ties to Russia, however, he may have thought it better for Chechnya to stay in the Russian Federation (Seely, 2001, 110-112). By late 1992, Khasbulatov had emerged as a powerful rival to Yeltsin. He had built up a broad base of support and even a "shadow government" to counterbalance Yeltsin's power (Seely, 2001, 143). He used his political success to propose legislation that would have strengthened his power against that of Yeltsin. He also built a formidable inner circle including Fillip Bobkov, a former KGB official in charge of monitoring organizations and Col. Gen. Vladislav Achalov, who participated in the 1991 Baltic crack down and the attempted coup against Gorbachev (Seely, 2001, 143). Khasbulatov posed a significant political threat to Yeltsin and this rivalry was to play an important role in the development of the first Chechen war.

THE WAR PATH

The first Chechen war resulted from a combination of personal power struggles, ethnic rivalries, nationalist independence movements and the ill-fated policies of the Russian government at the time.

Between late 1991 and 1994, Chechnya received little attention from Moscow primarily due to larger struggles over the direction of the Russian Federation and other former Soviet republics. For instance, there was much trouble in Georgia where Zviad Gamsakhurdia's regime was overthrown by a bloody coup, violence in Abkhazia cost the

lives of thousands and left 150,000 homeless and South Ossetia broke away from the rest of the republic (Seely, 2001, 124). The situation in Nagorno-Karabakh led to a general war between Armenia and Azerbaijan (Seely, 2001, 124). There were troubles in other parts of the former Soviet Union as well. In Moldova, fighting in Transdnestria between Moldovan forces and "pro-Soviet rebels" left hundreds dead (Seely, 2001, 124). Also, in Russia itself, rival factions struggled for control over the direction the new Russian Federation would take, not the least of which was the rivalry between Yeltsin and Khasbualtov (Seely, 2001, 125).

The manipulation of ethnic rivalries in Moscow's political battles also took a heavy toll. For example, there was the Ossete/Ingush crisis, which was the result of a political battle between the Russian parliament and the Soviet parliament, which existed until December of 1991 (Seely, 2001, 131). In April of 1991 Russia passed a law entitled *On the Rehabilitation of Peoples Subject to Repression*, which ostensibly gave ethnic minorities the right to return to the lands that they held prior to the Stalinist mass deportations (Seely, 2001, 131. This law was intended to upstage a similar law passed by the Soviet parliament (Seely, 2001, 131). The law inevitably led to clashes between the Ingush and North Ossetians. Many Ingush, having misinterpreted the law, thought that it gave them the right to reclaim lands that were now part of North Ossetia. Many in North Ossetia feared that the law would cause their republic, which was already the federation's smallest, to shrink even more (Seely, 2001, 131). The Ingush campaign for the restoration of their land led to tensions between Ossetes and Ingush, which erupted into violence in October of 1991 (Seely, 2001, 133). The violence resulted in five hundred deaths and the displacement of fifty thousand people (Seely, 2001, 130).

By 1993, the political situation in Moscow was quickly deteriorating. On 21 September 1993, Yeltsin disbanded the Supreme Soviet and announced elections for its

replacement to take place on 12 December (Seely, 2001, 142). In response to this move, his political opponents staged a putsch (Seely, 2001, 142). The attempted coup was put down with tanks and soldiers loyal to Yeltsin, but the incident caused the deaths of one hundred forty people (Seely, 2001, 142). The failed coup of October 1993 was to have a profound effect on the direction of Russia's development as well as on the fate of Chechnya. As Seely points out:

> Although the putsch failed, its effects on Yeltsin were profound. It transformed the political landscape of Russia, ending the period in which Western governments hoped that Russia might become, in the immediate term, a liberal and democratic mirror image of themselves. It ushered in an era in which Russia would deal with the problems of identity and integrity in a more aggressive and violent fashion. The change was a key ingredient which led to the decision to invade Chechnya (142).

The putsch failed and the elections proceeded as planned, but the election results were not entirely favorable to Yeltsin. Though the parliamentary elections in December yielded "the largest single share of seats" for Yeltsin's pro-democracy Russia's Choice Party, the Communists and Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), a far-right nationalist party, formed a powerful minority (Seely, 2001, 146). Taken together, these two incidents appeared to have left Yeltsin's faith in his liberal reform agenda badly shaken. It would seem that the putsch and the elections left Yeltsin with the following impressions:

- His path to reform was an unpopular one (Seely, 2001, 147).
- "He needed to ensure the loyalty of the army and the security forces" (Seely, 2001, 147).

- The Russian Federation had to have a firm constitutional definition and boundaries (Seely, 2001, 147).
- He had to distance himself from the "transparent structures of Western-style government" and narrow his circle of trusted individuals to "those bound to him by personal loyalty" (Seely, 2001, 147).
- In order to "ensure his the stability of his regime, and therefore of Russia, he needed to extend his control over all the power ministries. To this end, he relied increasingly on ensuring the loyalty of members of his Security Council" (Seely, 2001, 147).

Furthermore, the political and economic turmoil and the open rise of criminality in this period gave liberal economic and political reform a bad name and created a desire among many to see a *vozhd* - or strong leader - and kindled nostalgia for the USSR (Seely, 2001, 150). Yeltsin's opponents championed a policy of *derzhavnost* - or "strong statehood" – that would favor strong state authority over the Western ideal of individual rights (Seely, 2001, 150). The apparent popularity of these concepts caused Yeltsin to move toward a more authoritarian or "Soviet" model for his government, while still wearing the mask of liberal reformer for Western observers (Seely, 2001, 150).

If the putsch and the elections had shaken up Yeltsin's faith in liberal democracy, the aftermath left him in a somewhat stronger position in terms of his authority as president. With opposition leaders such as Khasbulatov and Rutskoi in prison as a result of the putsch, Yeltsin no longer needed to make compromises and withdrew much of the autonomy and privileges that the republics enjoyed under the earlier federation treaties (Seely, 2001, 154). Yeltsin's newfound authority also enabled him to broker a deal between Ingush and Ossetes that ended the violence between them, allowed forty thousand Ingush to return to villages in North Ossetia, and persuaded the Ingush to drop

territorial claims in North Ossetia (Seely, 2001, 154). Yeltsin would not have had this kind of authority earlier and the fact that the government was able to end the violence may indicate that faulty government policies were at fault in the first place (Seely, 2001, 154).

In order to usher in the *derzhavnost* and establish himself as the *vozhd*, Yeltsin needed to create a strong unified Russia. By early 1994, Chechnya was the only loose end for Russian territorial integrity (Seely, 2001, 154). With Chechnya refusing to be a part of the new Russian constitution, Yeltsin publicly warned that civil war could be approaching, citing the October 1993 putsch to back his claims (Seely, 2001, 155). Yeltsin thought he might be able to broker a deal with Chechnya as he had done with Ossetia and Ingushetia, but Dudayev refused to meet with him (Seely, 2001, 155). After this snub from Dudayev, Moscow tightened its blockade around Chechnya (Seely, 2001, 155). Dudayev responded by warning of an impending military assault by Russia, though this contention may have been aimed at shoring up his support among Chechens, which was starting to wane (Seely, 2001, 155).

There is evidence that Dudayev was growing bolder by this time, which may have been the result of the failed 1991 coup in Chechnya (Evangelista, 2002, 16-17). Yeltsin appears to have set a precedent during this event. Dudayev and his supporters took advantage of the failed coup to occupy government buildings, stage large demonstrations and generally cause unrest in Chechnya (Evangelista, 2002, 17). Yeltsin refused then Chechen president Zavgayev's demands to authorize force against the demonstrators (Evangelista, 2002, 18). Instead, he sent his envoy, Ruslan Khasbulatov, to convince Zavgayev to abolish the Chechen-Ingush Supreme Soviet and establish a temporary provisional council to govern until new parliamentary elections could be held (Evangelista, 2002, 18). Dudayev and company used this opportunity to seize the local

KGB headquarters and the weapons within it (Evangelista, 2002, 18). This apparent lack of resolve on Yeltsin's part may have had the effect of emboldening Dudayev to try to seize more power for himself and move Chechnya further away from Moscow's control in the aftermath of the 1993 putsch.

Yeltsin may have been able to minimize Dudayev and keep an acceptable level of influence over Chechnya, had it not been for the personal power struggle between him and Ruslan Khasbulatov. The Yeltsin government devised a military and economic plan to bring Chechnya under control (Seely, 2001, 155-156). The plan would create three districts; a loyalist district, a rebel district and a district under direct Russian control (Seely, 2001, 155-156). Grozny and the land containing the railways and oil pipelines would come under the direct control of the federal government (Seely, 2001, 155-156). The loyal district and the controlled districts would receive economic and military aid, while the rebel district would be isolated (Seely, 2001, 155-156). This policy ran into trouble, however, when Khasbulatov, having been granted amnesty by the parliament, returned to Chechnya. He openly criticized both Yeltsin and Dudayev and called for the reintegration of Chechnya into the Russian Federation. Khasbulatov's presence in Chechnya caused Yeltsin to fear that his political rival might become too powerful in Chechnya and influenced his decision to change course (Seely, 2001, 157-158 and Lieven, 1998, 90). Yeltsin apparently concerned himself not just with the ouster of Dudayev, but also with the "sidelining" of Khasbulatov and preventing him from becoming too strong (Lieven, 1998, 89-90). The attempted marginalization of Khasbulatov may have been a gross mistake because Khasbulatov was probably the only opposition leader who had a serious chance of garnering the kind of popular support among Chechens needed to mobilize against Dudayev (Lieven, 1998, 89-90). In order to thwart Khasbulatov's aspirations, Yeltsin changed his strategy. Instead of strangling off

support for Dudayev, Yeltsin attempted to make concessions with him in an effort to weaken Khasbulatov's influence (Seely, 2001, 157-158). What followed was a confused and contradictory policy that led Russia to negotiate with both Dudayev and his opposition. It was ultimately unfruitful because Dudayev still refused to meet with Yeltsin unless he was recognized as the head of the Chechen state (Seely, 2001, 158-160). The rivalry with Khasbulatov would also give Yeltsin a sense of urgency for action in Chechnya that would ultimately prove disastrous (Seely, 2001, 166).

By late summer of 1994, the Kremlin decided that action was needed, but also that a direct military intervention was out of the question. Yeltsin himself said that "intervention by force in impermissible and must not be done" and that it would "rouse the whole Caucasus, there would be such a commotion, there would be so much blood that nobody would forgive us" (Lieven, 1998, 88). Military advisors and intelligence officials alike had also advised strongly against direct military intervention due lack of preparedness for such a conflict and the fact that ten thousand troops were already employed as peacekeepers in Ingushetia and Ossetia (Lieven, 1998, 88). Yeltsin also expressed optimism that opposition to Dudayev was growing in Chechnya (Lieven, 1998, 89-90). These factors probably prompted the administration to try to oust Dudayev by proxy through the Chechen Provisional Council with material, but not direct support from the Russian military (Lieven, 1998, 89-90).

However, in December of 1994, federal troops entered Chechnya in a full scale invasion. What changed between August and December of 1994? Why did President Yeltsin rule out the use of military force and then only a few months later insist that it was necessary? The answer may lie partially in the political situation in Moscow at the time. The previous year's elections had given Zhirinovsky's party nearly twenty five percent of the vote. Yeltsin may have interpreted this to mean that the hardliners were

gaining in popularity and thus felt pressured to act decisively. That factor, combined with his flagging political support, may have led him to conclude that a quick military victory would boost his popularity (Lieven, 1998, 87). There were also four high-profile bus hijackings carried out by Chechens between May and July of 1994. The last and most tragic occurred in the town of Mineralny Vody (Lieven, 1998, 86). The hijackings may have strengthened the positions of the more hawkish members of Yeltsin's cabinet and provided a catalyst for the invasion (Lieven, 1998, 86). But the most decisive factor of all was probably a bungled covert operation in the late autumn that was as embarrassing as it was tragic.

On 26 November, the anti-Dudayev opposition forces, with support from Russian tanks and BMPs (manned by Russian soldiers) launched an assault on Grozny to capture the city and take out Dudayev (Lieven, 1998, 92). The operation was poorly planned and badly bungled. Partially because the opposition fighters did not support their Russian counterparts, the operation turned into a fiasco, resulting in twelve Russian soldiers killed and nineteen captured (Lieven, 1998, 92). This humiliating defeat backed Yeltsin into a corner. He could now no longer deny direct Russian involvement in Chechnya. To back off would have led to more bloodshed between Dudayev and the opposition. Without Russian support, Dudayev would have probably overwhelmed the opposition and established himself as the undisputed leader of Chechnya. This would have cost Russia the republic, something Yeltsin could not have survived politically. He was beset from both sides of the political aisle, accused of weakness from the hardliners and of fomenting armed conflict from the reformers. He felt that only option at this point was a full-scale military incursion. As Lieven points out; "The decision once made, the Russian administration stumbled from one bungled approach to another, finding itself progressively drawn in deeper and deeper" (90).

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE FIRST WAR

The first Chechen war was a costly war that could have been avoided. It was ultimately the result of a toxic combination of factors; resurfacing ethnic rivalries in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse, reactionary opposition to the Chechen independence movement, personal power struggles, Yeltsin's desire to establish a strong federal government and probably most importantly, the need to keep Chechnya in the federation as Russia struggled to formulate its new identity and establish its place in the world. The effort to maintain Chechnya as part of the Russian Federation grew out of a need to maintain a strong and unified Russia with its entire political house in order. There were fears in the Yeltsin administration that Chechen independence would lead to a general unraveling of the federation (Seely, 2001, 3). The oil wealth of the Caucasus was also a major factor for the Kremlin's desire to keep Chechnya from slipping away (Lieven, 1998, 85). Even though Chechen oil production had fallen off sharply, access to the Baku-Novorosiisk pipelines gave Chechnya considerable economic importance (Lieven, 1998, 85). However, Boris Yeltsin and Russia shouldn't bare all of the blame. Much of the responsibility falls to the leaders of the various Chechen factions, who in their power struggles, allowed the country to descend into violence and chaos. As Robert Seely points out, "Chechen leaders offered their people neither a stable and defensible political framework outside the Russian Federation, nor some kind of workable *modus vivendi* within it" (2). In other words, the Chechen leaders denied the Chechen people the chance to have either a stable, independent Chechnya or a dignified existence as Russian citizens. As was noted earlier in this chapter, Dudayev's refusal to work with Yeltsin or to be associated with Russia in any way was very significant in setting into motion the events that led to the war. The war cost billions of rubles and thousands of lives, not to mention untold human misery and suffering. It also caused severe damage to Yeltsin's

political career. For all of this, the results were inconclusive. Russian forces withdrew in 1996 without establishing any meaningful control in Chechnya. Chechnya was still nominally part of the federation, but in practicality it remained independent. A working government was not established and the country soon fell into lawlessness (Seely, 2001, 305). The lawless environment soon made it an ideal base of operations for drug smugglers, bandits and terrorists and facilitated the popularity of Islamic extremism among the population. By 1999, due primarily to these factors, the small Caucasus republic would be engulfed by another destructive and costly war.

THE ASCENDENCY OF PUTIN

In September of 1998, Prime Minister Evgeny Primakov emphasized the need to "preserve Russia as a single state" and called for "the restoration of the vertical state power structure" (Evangelista, 2002, 127). With these statements that would appear to foreshadow the positions of Vladimir Putin, Primakov called for the establishment of powerful central government and the suppression of separatist tendencies. In his opinion, the notion of independent or autonomous regions within Russia were a threat to Russian unity and therefore to the strength of Russia as a nation. This was an idea that would find a proponent in Vladimir Putin and would help shape the course of a nation and steer it back into war in the Caucasus.

By 1999, the Yeltsin presidency was ailing. The first Chechen war, charges of corruption and the 1998 financial crisis had taken a severe political toll on Boris Yeltsin. He was evidently looking for an exit (Hughes, 2007, 108). Additionally, things were heating up again in Chechnya. In August an incursion by Chechen radicals into Dagestan prompted Yeltsin to fire Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin and appoint Vladimir Putin in his place (Hughes, 2007, 108). In so doing, he turned power over to elements within the

government who wanted a unified Russia with a powerful central government and would not buck the idea of an independent Chechnya (Hughes, 2007, 108). Vladimir Putin wanted to re-establish Russia as a powerful nation with a strong government and foster a sense of Russian nationalism (Hughes, 2007, 111). Putin stated his preference for central control over regional authority, claiming that the latter only led to "popular anxiety and insecurity". For Putin, the creation of a strong state was the only way to ensure security, even at the expense of democracy (Evangelista, 2002, 132).

Although he was Prime Minister, Putin's public visibility and popularity were relatively low, which meant that his vision for Russia's future lacked a popular platform (Hughes, 2007, 108, 110). Furthermore, presidential elections were due to be conducted in March of 2000 and Putin's prospects for winning were low at the time (Hughes, 2007, 108). Putin needed a way to both bolster his popularity among the citizens and to create a platform for his vision for Russia. In the words of James Hughes, the author of *Chechnya; From Nationalism to Jihad* (2007):

> Chechnya was to be the anvil on which Putin hammered out a public position as an ideologue for a new kind of Russian nationalism. The re-conquest of Chechnya would not only undo the national humiliation of the defeat in 1996, but also serve as the vehicle for a recentralization and strengthening of state power in Russia (110).

It would appear that history was about to repeat itself in the form of another military incursion into Chechnya as a method to bolster a political career. And similar to Yeltsin, Putin saw the reassertion of control in Chechnya as an essential component to Russia's new identity as a strong state and powerful nation. There were, however, some key differences between Putin's decision to go to war in Chechnya and that of his predecessor's. Prior to the 1994 invasion, there was generally no provocation on Russian

territory by any Chechen groups. But 1999, an incursion of Chechen Islamic radicals into Dagestan and a series of apartment bombings in Russia provided a justification for military action on the pretext of an anti-terrorism operation (Hughes, 2007, 108, 110). Furthermore, Putin experienced a level of support from the military establishment that Yeltsin did not. Instead of generals resigning over military intervention, as was the case with Yeltsin, generals actually threatened to resign if the Putin government started negotiations before the military campaign was finished (Hughes, 2007, 108). Finally, whereas Yeltsin's war had hurt his political career, Putin's decision to use force served to bolster his popularity, establish his reputation as a strong leader and ultimately propel him to victory in the March, 2000 presidential election (Hughes, 2007, 111).

CHECHNYA'S TROUBLES

Events that would precipitate the second war took shape in Grozny as well as in Moscow. With the 1996 death of Dzhokar Dudayev and the need to return to some type of "political normality", Chechnya held elections in January of 1997 (Evangelista, 2002, 48). General Aslan Maskhadov, who had signed the Khasaviurt Accord with General Lebed in 1996, was elected president with over fifty nine percent of the vote (Evangelista, 2002, 48). At the time, Maskhadov was considered one of the more moderate voices in Chechen politics and the one most likely to work with Moscow to reach a peaceful compromise acceptable to both Russia's and Chechnya's interests (Evangelista, 2002, 48). Indeed for a time, a "nominally independent Chechnya working in close economic and political cooperation with Russia" seemed like it might be a reality (Evangelista, 2002, 51). However, despite the hope brought by Maskhadov's election, the issues that threatened to prevent Chechen stability and lead to renewed hostilities continued to linger (Evangelista, 2002, 48). The Chechen economy was in tatters, a

working government still had not been implemented and violent crime and kidnappings were of epidemic proportions (Evangelista, 2002, 47). In fact, Maskhadov's apparent inability (or unwillingness) to curb the rampant criminality and kidnappings would be one of the main factors leading to the second invasion (Hughes, 2007, 96). The kidnapping of high profile individuals was one of the most vexing issues for the government of Chechnya, one that would cost it dearly in terms of much needed foreign assistance and Moscow's good graces. Some of these high profile cases included the kidnapping and beheading of four British telecommunications workers and the plane-side abduction and later murder of the Russian deputy interior minister, General Gennady Shpigun (Hughes, 2007, 96). The Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe Assistance Group in Chechnya (OSCE AGC) reported that "crime unrest and acts of terrorism have acquired endemic proportions, adding to a volatile political situation and a general breakdown of law and order" (Hughes, 2007, 96). The situation ultimately led to the removal of the OSCE AGC in December of 1998 along with many other international aid organizations. Funds for economic aid and reconstruction were officially allocated by Russia, but "bureaucratic corruption in Moscow" prevented most of it from reaching Chechnya (Hughes, 2007, 97).

Perhaps the most troublesome issue for Maskhadov, though, was the question of a permanent, settled status for Chechnya. The inability to come to an agreement with Moscow over Chechnya's status and degree of independence weakened Maskhadov's ability to "consolidate authority and establish an effective system of governance" (Hughes, 2007, 97). This led to further destabilization and caused the case of Chechnya to become just one more post-Soviet frozen conflict in the Caucasus (Hughes, 2007, 97).

THE RISE OF THE RADICALS

One factor that played significant role in the second war and that was not present in the first was that of Islamic radicalism. As Matthew Evangelista, the author of *The Chechen Wars,* (2002) points out:

> The influence of radical Islamic movements, such as Wahabism, increased in the wake of the war and the physical and economic devastation that it wrought. Indeed, the precipitating cause of the second war was an August 1999 invasion of Dagestan by Chechen and Dagestani fighters, marching under the banner of Islam and unconstrained -by the central government in Grozny (46).

A growing religiosity took root in many post-Soviet territories and Chechnya was no exception. After the first war, Islamic radicalization began to emerge as a problem. The trauma, deprivations and the power vacuum caused by the war may have caused many to turn to radical Islam as the answer for their problems. These factors combined with the apparent inability of the Maskhadov government to curb the activities of criminal and radical groups to enable the growth of radical Islam in Chechnya (Hughes, 2007, 97-98). To highlight the extent to which radical Islamism permeated Chechen society in the late 1990s, consider that Shamil Basayev, who had the support of radical Muslim elements, garnered almost twenty five percent of the vote in 1997 (Evangelista, 2002, 48). Furthermore, In February 1999, under pressure from radical elements, Maskhadov abolished the Chechen parliament and instituted Sharia law (Evangelista, 2002, 57-58). The breakdown of the duly elected secular government in Chechnya caused great consternation in the Russian government, which claimed that Maskhadov had no authority to take such an action (Evangelista, 2002, 57-58).

It is little wonder that the prospect of having a rogue state governed by Islamic radicals within its borders set off alarm bells in the Putin administration. It would soon become apparent that the radical Islamists were not interested in territorial boundaries or in Chechnya as an independent, sovereign state. According to Hughes; "they aspired to create an Islamic caliphate in the North Caucasus" (102). This tendency to disregard the significance of territorial borders indicates that they were internationalists in a sense, furthering the radical agenda of a world-wide Islamic state. It is also important to consider that the spread of radicalism threatened to create a domino effect of one Caucasus state after the other falling to radical Islam, eventually culminating in the creation of the North Caucasus caliphate, which would cause Russia to lose control of the region and enable the establishment of a safe haven for further terrorist and radical Islamist activities.

Following what appeared to be the complete takeover of Chechnya by radical Islamic elements in 1999, relations between Grozny and Moscow rapidly deteriorated. The kidnapping and murder of Gennady Shpigun in March of the same year resulted in mutual finger pointing between Moscow and Grozny as to who was to blame, each accusing the other of being too lax with security (Evangelista, 2002, 58). In March of 1999, Russian helicopters and fighters had penetrated Chechen airspace (Evangelista, 2002, 59). Maskhadov's response was an order to "shoot down all unauthorized aircraft flying over the country" (Evangelista, 2002, 59). On March 29th, the Maskhadov government shut off Azerbaijani oil transiting through Chechnya claiming that one hundred million Rubles in tariffs and transit fees were in arrears (Evangelista, 2002, 59). The cumulative result of these events at this point was a general breakdown in relations between Russia and Chechnya.

PUTIN'S JIHAD

The catalyst for a second military intervention would finally come in the summer of 1999. In August, a force under Shamil Basayev crossed over the Dagestani border into the Botlikh area with the intention of starting "the 'jihad' to 'liberate' the North Caucasus from the Russian infidels and establish a Caliphate" (Hughes, 2007, 105). Basayev's invasion gave Putin and the other *siloviki* (those in charge of the national security apparatus) the ability to promote the mantra that Chechnya was an "ungovernable bandit state" and had to be reconquered by way of military force in order to "re-impose order" (Hughes, 2007, 107).

However, the Botlikh invasion did more than merely provide a plausible pretext for a second military campaign in Chechnya. For the Putin administration, it opened up the possibility that Dagestan could fall to the radicalism that had taken root in Chechnya, a possibility that could have severe economic consequences. As Hughes points out: "The attack on Botlikh by Basayev and Khattab threatened to destabilize Dagestan, which given the anarchy in Chechnya, provided Russia with its only land corridor for the newly constructed Transneft pipeline linking the Caspian and Novorossiisk" (Hughes, 2007, 107). At this point Putin seemed justified in his position that Chechnya was "a failed state in the hands of Islamic fundamentalists which threatened a wider destabilization in the North Caucasus" (Hughes, 2007, 111).

The unrest in Chechnya now threatened the stability of the region as a whole and with it, the security of Russian oil interests and the health of the Russian economy. Further justification for the use of force came in the form of terrorist attacks on Russian soil the following month. In September of 1999, apartment bombings attributed to Chechen terrorists in Moscow, Volgadonsk and Buinaksk claimed three hundred casualties (Hughes, 2007, 110). The apartment bombings helped to stoke anti-Chechen

sentiment in Russia and provided Putin with even more leverage to frame the Chechen conflict as a counter-terrorism effort (Hughes, 2007, 110). In fact, Putin used the 1998 law, "On the Struggle Against Terrorism", which allowed the armed forces to be deployed in counterterrorism operations, to justify the use of force in Chechnya (Hughes, 2007, 111-112).

CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER TWO

In contrast to the first war, the Russian military proved to be initially very successful. During the initial stage of the war, Grozny fell quickly with relatively few Russian losses, but the Russian bombardment inflicted heavy civilian casualties (Hughes, 2007, 111-112). The application of overwhelming force caused conventional Chechen resistance to fold, but this meant that many of the fighters left the city and took to the countryside and the war soon became an insurgency (Hughes, 2007, 112-113). Despite their initial successes, the Russian forces were largely ineffective at containing the rebels' activities and seemed to be incapable of keeping Chechen fighters from crossing over into Dagestan and other areas (Politkovskaya, 1999, 31). Furthermore, the Russian government seemed unwilling or unable to deliver the much needed humanitarian aid that was so publicly promised (Politkovskaya, 1999, 31). The difficulty of combating the Chechen guerilla tactics and Moscow's apparent disregard for the well-being of the civilian population in the conflict zone resulted in a protracted insurgency that would again cost thousands of lives and cause grave human suffering.

Why was retaining Chechnya in the Russian Federation so important that it led to two wars that were destructive and painful for both sides? A big part of the answer to this question may be that both Yeltsin and Putin wanted to create a strong Russian state and would not tolerate a federation republic charting its own course. As Evangelista put

it; “Russian leaders’ preoccupation with the weakness of the center in relation to the regions is part of the explanation for two brutal wars in Chechnya” (125). This statement suggests that the wars in Chechnya were at least partially in the name of consolidating and reaffirming Moscow’s control, not just over the North Caucasus, but over the whole of the Russian Federation. Indeed the reassertion of Russian control in Chechnya was a requirement for Putin’s vision of a strong and unified Russia going forward into the 21st Century. In addition to the political goals of the two campaigns, economic interests came into play as well. As was already noted, the possible loss of Chechnya and the general destabilization of the North Caucasus threatened Russia’s access to the region’s oil resources. The political instability in Chechnya played a role as well. The Chechen leadership’s inability to establish a working government created a lawless environment where criminal elements and Islamic radical groups virtually had a free hand to do as they pleased. This lawlessness contributed significantly to the radicals’ ability to carry out raids and terrorist attacks across Chechnya’s borders. In the end, Maskhadov’s inability to assert his authority over the radical elements in Chechnya caused an “erosion of his stature as a viable negotiating partner for Russia and the international community who could deliver peace and stability in Chechnya” (Hughes, 2007, 102).

Some of the darkest episodes in post-Soviet Russian history occurred as a consequence of the second Chechen war. The Dubrovka Theater hostage crisis of 2002, during which Chechen terrorists took hostages in Moscow and the Beslan school tragedy of 2004, which resulted in hundreds of deaths, many of them children, were both the result of the Chechen conflict spilling over into other Russian territories. In some ways, the conflict still continues to spill over into other territories. The Moscow Domodedovo Airport bombing in December 2010 was attributed to a Chechen terrorist group and as recently as July of this year, Russia’s *Независимая газета* reported that the situation in

Dagestan resembles that in the Gaza Strip (Mukhin[i]). The situation in Chechnya and the North Caucasus continues to pose a challenge for the Russian government's ability to assert its authority and provide stability in the region. It is conceivable that Russia will continue to deal with the Chechen question for some time to come.

Chapter Three

Russia has vested interests maintaining influence in the Caucasus. Its interests in the region range from the economic to the political to the geo-political. We have seen that Moscow is willing to go to war to maintain its influence in the region, but what could threaten Russian influence in the Caucasus? What or who could diminish Russia's influence in the region and threaten its interests there? Is there truly a possibility that the drive for Chechen independence would cause a chain reaction of secession from the other North Caucasus republics? If Georgia aligned itself with the Western powers, could Europe and the U.S. pose a threat to Russian hegemony in the region?

This chapter will examine how the Chechen independence movement impacted Russia's ties to the other North Caucasus republics. It will also explore the issue of whether or not Georgia could pose a threat as a NATO member. Finally it will examine what the growth of Islamic radicalism in the North Caucasus could mean for Russia's ability to maintain its influence in the region.

The loss of one of the Russian republics in would indeed have significant consequences for Russia. As figure one illustrates, the location of oil pipelines leading from the Caspian Sea into the heart of Russia would mean that the loss of just one or two of the North Caucasus republics could have significant economic ramifications.

Figure 1: Caspian Oil Pipelines[ii]

For instance, were Russia to lose Chechnya, it would lose the Rostov-Baku highway and railway, which according to Evangelista are "the only links between northern Russia and Transcaucasia and the countries of southern and eastern Europe" (3). The possible loss of access to Caspian oil was one of the main factors influencing the decision to use force in Chechnya. However, Lieven points out that it was corruption by the directors of Transneft that prevented Russia from gaining a larger share of Caspian oil, thus disputing claims that the troubles in Chechnya were to blame (85). In addition to the geographical considerations, the presence of a North Caucasus republic where Moscow could not maintain its influence could have political ramifications as well. The perceived weakness of the Kremlin could undermine its authority in other republics and could damage the political aspirations of the Putin administration. But is this a feasible scenario? Let us examine the claims that Chechnya's bid for independence threatened to start a trend of secession by other North Caucasus republics.

"THE PARADE OF SOVEREIGNTIES"

Vladimir Putin once expressed his opinion that the situation in Chechnya was a "continuation of the collapse of the USSR" (Evangelista, 2002, 5). Part of his justification for the second war in Chechnya was that if he didn't get control of the situation in Chechnya, Russia would dissolve like the USSR did (Evangelista, 2002, 6). Similarly, military officials and advisors in the Yeltsin cabinet warned that Chechen independence could lead to a "brushfire of drives for independence" and that once Chechnya had obtained independence, "all of their neighbors would want it too" (Evangelista, 2002, 89-90). However, there is evidence that this type of alarmism from Yeltsin and Putin may not have been warranted. Evangelista, for instance, is of the opinion that it was not Chechen independence that threatened to break up the federation

as they feared, but rather it was the heavy handed and unenlightened Russian response that threatened to drive the North Caucasus republics away. Nevertheless, there was still no general drive for secession from the other republics. Those fears were apparently unfounded (Evangelista, 2002, 87). Take for instance the case of Dagestan. Dagestan and Chechnya share many of the same traits historically, religiously, economically and geographically. Sufi Islam is widely practiced in both republics and the two share many of the same social and military customs such as hospitality, mastery of weapons, blood feuds and the organization of clan-based societies (Evangelista, 2002, 92). They also share many of the same problems. Chechnya and Dagestan are the two poorest republics in the Russian Federation; both have abysmal unemployment rates, which contributes to a high level of organized crime in both places (Evangelista, 2002, 93). Of all the republics, politicians and planners in Moscow would have had the greatest cause to view Dagestan as "the next Chechnya" (Evangelista, 2002, 92). In actuality, however, Dagestan showed little inclination to pursue independence. Given Dagestan's bleak economic situation in the 1990s, separation would have hurt Dagestan because it would have meant the loss of the significant economic and structural aid it had been getting from Moscow (Evangelista, 2002, 92). In the year 2000, salaries for state employees increased fifty percent and pensions were being regularly paid to retirees (Evangelista, 2002, 95).

In addition to economic considerations, Dagestan's political and social fabric also made it an unlikely candidate for separation. Instead of being a relatively homogeneous society with a strong ethnic identity like Chechnya, Dagestan's ethnic make-up is quite diverse, comprising what anthropologist Robert Chenciner called "a microcosm of the ethnic mosaic of the Soviet Union" (Evangelista, 2002, 92). The diverse ethnic landscape of Dagestan was one of the reasons that a strong anti-Russian sentiment did not develop (Evangelista, 2002, 92). Furthermore, fears that the violence in Chechnya would spill

over the border and destabilize Dagestan ultimately proved to be ungrounded. It is more likely that the violence in Chechnya strengthened ties with Russia. The instability instilled a sense of nostalgia for the security and stability of the Soviet Days among many Dagestanis (Evangelista, 2002, 94). Additionally, Shamil's attack and other incursions by Chechen militants only caused Dagestan to look to Moscow for help in fighting against them. In Evangelista's words:

> Despite the vast disparities in wealth, the war against the Wahhabi and Chechen militants fostered – at least temporarily – a new sense of unity. It enhanced support for the both the government in Makhachkala and the federal authorities, including the Russian army. Finally, the war gave some justification for the Dagestani government to crack down on Wahhabi organizations in the republic, something that it had been reluctant to do previously (95).

However, despite the economic and security cooperation between Makhachkala and Moscow, Dagestanis' frustration with Russia are not lacking; particularly in the conduct of their operations against Chechen militants in Dagestan. For example, in August of 1999, fighting between Russian Federal forces and Islamist fighters destroyed the Dagestani village of Ansalta (Politkovskaya, 1999, 27). The displaced villagers expressed their frustration over the loss of their village and over the fact that the Russian government had allowed Shamil Basayev to escape four years earlier following the Budyonnovsk hostage crisis (Politkovskaya, 1999, 27). The crisis occurred in June of 1995 when Shamil Basayev led a force into the Stavropol town of Budyonnovsk and attacked it (Lieven, 1998, 124). Basayev's fighters stormed the police station and town hall before moving into the hospital, taking several hundred hostages with him (Lieven, 1998, 124). Several hostages were killed during two failed attempts to dislodge the

Chechen fighters (Lieven, 1998, 124). Fearing that Basayev might kill more hostages, the Russian government negotiated a cease-fire with him that granted safe passage back to Chechnya for him and his fighters (Lieven, 1998, 124). The incident highlighted the Yeltsin administration's apparent inability to protect Russian citizens from Chechen terrorists and its ineptitude in the conduct of the Chechen war (Lieven, 1998, 125). The amnesty for Basayev apparently angered many Dagestani refugees, who blamed the ongoing violence in Dagestan on Russia's apparent weakness in the face of its enemy (Politkovskaya, 1999, 27-28). The irony here is that the Russian government was compelled to make concessions to Chechen terrorists while angering and alienating friendly Dagestanis. Despite the frustration, though, Dagestan did not show much inclination for separation. It would a appear that the concerns of Yeltsin and Putin that Chechnya would start a trend of secession or that radical Islamists would take control of the region were unfounded (Evangelista, 2002, 96).

Concerns from the Russian government over a general dissolution of the Federation, like the dissolution of the Soviet Union also seemed to be over exaggerated. Such was the case of Tatarstan. In the early 1990s, Tatarstan had the appearance of being dangerously similar to Chechnya. Both had predominantly Muslim populations both had strong nationalist movements and both showed a strong inclination for independence. In fact, Tatarstan was the only other republic besides Chechnya that refused to sign the Federative Treaty proposed by Yeltsin (Evangelista, 2002, 96). The Russian government had cause to worry about the consequences of losing this republic. Tatars were second largest ethnic group in the federation next to Russians. Additionally, Tatarstan was an economic power within the federation with military, timber, paper, automotive, and oil industries and up to eight hundred million tons of oil reserves (Evangelista, 2002, 96). So Yeltsin may have had cause for concern over Tatarstan's nationalist movement.

However, whereas Yeltsin attempted to intervene militarily against Dudayev's nationalist uprising in Chechnya in September of 1991, he took a different approach with Tatarstan (Evangelista, 2002, 101). He sent his adviser on ethnic issues, Galina Starovoitova as an envoy (Evangelista, 2002, 101). Starovoitova was respected in Tatarstan and offered a path for greater Tatar autonomy while tempering it with a firm message that Russia would enforce its laws in Tatarstan. She even left the possibility of secession open, but it was unlikely that Tatarstan would have been able to fulfill the conditions for independence (Evangelista, 2002, 102). In addition to Yeltsin's and Starovoitova's more balanced approach, Tatar president Mintimir Shaimiev's demeanor may have had much to do with the fact that Tatarstan was able to achieve a peaceful existence in the Russian Federation. Shaimiev was a shrewd political leader and was able to bridge gaps between rival factions, change courses when events demanded and was willing to work with the Yeltsin government (Evangelista, 2002, 102). Therefore, Tatarstan took a path of compromise rather than that of armed rebellion. In the end, Tatarstan and the Russian federation ended up signing a "treaty with Moscow that satisfied the Tatar nationalists while providing the Russian government with the assurance that it would not secede (Evangelista, 2002, 96). In this manner, the path to separation and possibly armed conflict was abandoned in favor of a mutually beneficial agreement between Moscow and Kazan.

Bashkortostan was another region that the government in Moscow worried might pose a risk of separation. Like Dagestan and Tatarstan, Bashkortostan also has a predominantly Muslim population. Furthermore, as was the case with Tatarstan, Bashkortostan's resources, wealth and industry meant that the loss of the republic could have dealt a serious blow to the Russian Federation. There were even some who worried that Tatarstan's and Bashkortostan's proximity and shared heritage would lead them to

form a union that could pose a serious challenge to the Russian Federation (Evangelista, 2002, 109). But fears about Bashkortostan's separation and/or a union with Tatarstan were inconsistent with the actual probability of these events occurring. Disagreements over cultural and language rights as well as a lack of any apparent benefit to unification made a Bashkir/Tatar union unlikely (Evangelista, 2002, 109-110). The other cause for concern was the fact that Islam was the predominant religion. However, Bashkortostan has a fairly diverse and cosmopolitan population and religious practice in the republic is relatively low (Evangelista, 2002, 110). Although fifty six percent of ethnic Bashkirs identify themselves as Muslim, only twenty five percent are practicing Muslims, while forty four percent report being atheist or agnostic (Evangelista, 2002, 110). But perhaps the primary concern for Bashkortostan was its reluctance toward the Federative Treaty (Evangelista, 2002, 110). President Murtaza Rakhimov, agreed to sign the treaty only after a supplemental agreement exclusive to Bashkortostan was appended to it (Evangelista, 2002, 110). The most important part of the agreement was that the local government would have control over the land's natural resources and would have some leverage to make economic agreements with foreign countries (Evangelista, 2002, 111). The desire for control of resources may have had less to do with any nationalist movement and more to do with president Rakhimov's desire for profit and to "gain control over the main revenue producers of the republic" (Evangelista, 2002, 111). Some observers have suggested that instead of greed, the agreement was aimed at helping Bashkortostan's economy recover after the decline of the Ruble and the government's debt defaults (Evangelista, 2002, 111). In any case, Bashkortostan did not pose a serious threat of separation either.

Although, they are not republics and do not have significant Muslim populations, the regions of Primor'e and Sakhalin may have given the Yeltsin administration cause for

concern that they were also flirting with separation. Geographic, economic and political factors could have made separation an attractive prospect for these two Far East regions. For instance, more than five thousand miles separate Moscow from Vladivostok. This vast distance between European Russia and the Far East led to a certain cultural gap. Whereas those in western Russia tend to be more community oriented, the cultural atmosphere in the Far East is more individualistic and independent (Evangelista, 2002, 115). Moscow's separation from the Far East had an economic impact as well. Since Moscow is the main transportation hub for the Russian Federation, the transportation tariffs drive up the price of goods and services in the Far East, which leads to a lower standard of living and negatively impacts the economy (Evangelista, 2002, 114). Furthermore, it seemed to make sense to eliminate Moscow as a middle man for the trade of the Far East's natural resources and to establish direct trading connections with China, Japan and even the U.S. just as the Baltic States wanted to trade directly with their European neighbors (Evangelista, 2002, 114). In the case of Sakhalin, Governor Valentin Fedorov threatened secession in 1992 if Russia were to return the Kuril Islands to Japan (Evangelista, 2002, 118). The Far Eastern Republic, a state that existed briefly after the revolution, even set a precedent in the case for separation (Evangelista, 2002, 115). Despite the geographical, economic and historical reasons for separation, the Far East regions never started a serious drive for independence, nor did they in Evangelista's words "establish distinctive political institutions to govern the territory independent of Moscow" (115). Talk of separation was used by the eastern region's leaders for the purpose of obtaining political leverage and separatist tendencies did not lead to secession as they had done in Chechnya (Evangelista, 2002, 121).

Despite assertions of independence and sovereignty by republics such as Tatarstan and Bashkortostan and the regions of Primor'e and Sakhalin, it turned out that there was

little practical risk of separation. The financial crisis of August, 1998 seemed to dampen the republics' desire to live without Moscow's support (Evangelista, 2002, 121). In the words of one representative from Sakhalin, "the parade of sovereignties is over" (Evangelista, 2002, 121). In the end, the central government in Moscow provided support for infrastructure and social services, such as pensions and government salaries, that the republics were not prepared do without. Preventing the disintegration of the Russian Federation as a justification for war in Chechnya was spurious (Evangelista, 2002, 122-123). As it turned out, the case of Chechnya was unique among Russian Federation republics.

GEORGIA

Outside of the Russian Federation, the main area of concern for Moscow is Georgia. Russia's relationship with Georgia and the separatist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia will be covered in greater detail in Chapter Four, but for now it is sufficient to say that the 2008 Russo-Georgian conflict made it abundantly clear that Russia was determined to prevent Georgia from joining NATO and keep it firmly within the Russian sphere of influence. For the Russian government, a West-friendly Georgia means the encroachment of NATO and Western interests onto Russia's borders and the possible undermining of Russian interests in the Caucasus. Some Russian analysts have accused the West (the U.S. and Great Britain in particular) of attempting to deprive Russia of access to the region's resources and of attempting to "militarize" the Caucasus in order to "turn it into NATO's military-political bridgehead" (Kireyev, 2010, 95). However, a slightly less alarmist scenario was outlined by Volkhonsky and Mukhanov in their publication for the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Россия На Кавказе; Пять веков истории* (2009). In this scenario, Georgia would join NATO and then begin a

military campaign to bring South Ossetia and Abkhazia under its jurisdiction by force, potentially causing a military confrontation between NATO and Russia (386). If this were feasible, then Georgia, as a NATO state, could pose a considerable risk to the stability of the region and would have a direct impact on Moscow's ability to influence affairs in the South Caucasus, particularly in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. However, it is unlikely that any of the NATO countries would agree to engage in such a potentially dangerous and costly war. Much of Western Europe has economic and trade relations with Russia. Furthermore, Europe relies heavily on natural gas and oil imports to fulfill its energy needs and much of these two resources come from Russia ("Wielding the Energy Sword"[iii]). Such a confrontation would spell economic disaster, not to mention that it would have a significant human cost. There have also been assurances from Georgia that it will not engage in any activities that will provoke another confrontation with Russia. In a 2011 interview with the *Washington Times*, the speaker of the Georgian Parliament, David Bakradze, stated that Georgia "made a unilateral commitment to the non-use of force" and that Georgia would not become embroiled in another military confrontation with Russia. He also considered the possibility of a Russian attack unlikely due to the intense international pressure it would bring to Russia ("Georgia won't drag NATO"[iv]).

In short, it is unlikely that Georgia would pose a threat to Russia's influence in the Caucasus, even if it were to be admitted to NATO. Vladimir Putin is apparently uncomfortable with the prospect of having another NATO state on its borders, but the Baltic States have not posed a threat to Russia, nor are they likely to. Having a NATO state in the Caucasus probably will not even significantly diminish Russian influence in the region or block Russia's access to Caspian oil. Again, we have only to look back to the example of Central Europe. Despite Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland being in

NATO and the EU, Russia still wields considerable influence in Europe through trade and economic treaties. Russian oil pipelines run through Estonia and Poland despite their pro-Western orientation. There are even energy and railway agreements between Russia and Estonia. Given the examples in the Baltic region, there seems to be no good reason why Russia and Georgia should not be able to have similar economic and trade agreements, which could significantly improve relations.

ISLAMIC RADICALISM

As far as the North Caucasus federation republics are concerned, the one factor that could challenge Russian influence is the emergence of radical Islam. We have seen in Chapter Two that since the end of the first Chechen war, Jihadism and Salafism began to emerge in Chechnya and have also begun to spread out into the neighboring republics, particularly Dagestan. Indeed, the stated purpose of the August 1999 raid on Botlikh by Basayev and Khattab's forces was to "start a jihad" that would ultimately result in the establishment of a North Caucasus caliphate (Hughes, 2007, 105). The movement to establish such a caliphate could legitimately threaten to undermine Moscow's influence in the North Caucasus.

One factor that could explain the growth in popularity of radical Islam in Chechnya may be the Russian policy of "Chechenization," which is the practice of ruling Chechnya through proxies (Hughes, 2007, 118). The corruption and greed of these proxies has been one of the obstacles to the meaningful changes that are necessary to truly improve conditions and quality of life in the region. For many (particularly young, unemployed men with few prospects) radical Islam offers an alternative the existing order and hope that their situation will improve if they only throw off the shackles of the infidels and live by the Koran. In an article for *Foreign Policy* (2011), Joshua Yaffa

points out that "Islam offers a salve for the maddening impotency caused by their collapsing economies and broken state structures"[v].

Even if no real caliphate were to be established, the rise of Islam as a method of establishing law and social structures threatens to supplant the governing institutions set in place by Moscow. For instance, Tom Parfitt, a contributor to *Foreign Policy* (2011), writes of a "creeping Islamization" that is occurring in Chechnya. According to his article, "The Islamic Republic of Chechnya," "Polygyny (illegal under Russian law) is now approved in unofficial ceremonies by mullahs, the sale of alcohol has been restricted to a two-hour time window each day, and the muftiat has issued strict advisories on women's attire that have been enforced, it appears, by informal militia.[vi] The supersession of Islamic laws and customs over Russian laws and customs in Chechnya shows that Moscow's influence could well be slipping in this republic that it fought so hard to keep as a manageable member of the federation. Beside the example of Kadyrov's Chechnya, there has been evidence in recent years of Sharia law supplanting Russian law in other North Caucasus republics. In the village of Novosasitli in Dagestan, Sharia law has replaced Russian law. Perhaps the most poignant evidence of Sharia's influence here was the execution of two women who were accused of fortune-telling and witch craft ("From Moscow to Mecca"[vii]). The killing was mandated by Sharia law, but is certainly considered murder under Russian law. Yet there was no mention of any attempt to prosecute the women's murderers under Russian law. Other mandates of Sharia law in the village include the wearing of *hijabs*, the practice of polygamy, the authority of the imams and a ban on alcohol (Ibid). The presence of Sharia law in this village and the disregard for Russian law indicates a distinct lack of Moscow's influence in this part of Dagestan. Furthermore, there is evidence that terrorist activity is on the rise in Dagestan. According to a report from Dagestan's law enforcement agency, one

hundred sixteen terrorist attacks were committed in the first half of 2012 resulting in 67 deaths ("Дагестан"[viii]). In response to the rise of terrorist activity, the federal government transferred eight hundred security personnel from Chechnya to Dagestan (Ibid). The reinforcement of its security contingent in Dagestan indicates that the Kremlin recognizes the tenuous situation in the North Caucasus republic and has taken steps to stabilize the situation. It remains to be seen if the efforts of the Federal Security Service (FSB) will be enough to pacify the region. Moscow also has to take measures aimed at improving infrastructure and creating jobs in order to address the economic situation in the North Caucasus. There is evidence that the Kremlin has taken steps in the right direction in this regard, but this subject will be covered more in Chapter Five.

CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER THREE

Yeltsin and Putin went to war in Chechnya ostensibly to prevent the general dissolution of the Russian Federation. Due to multiple factors, it turned out that nationalist independence movements failed to take root in other republics and therefore those concerns were unfounded. Concerns that a more West friendly Georgia would undermine Russian influence in the South Caucasus and block access to Caspian oil are also unrealistic. However, the Kremlin's concern about the rise of radical Islam in the North Caucasus appears to be more realistically grounded. Jihadism and Islamic terrorism threaten the peace and stability of the region and therefore they threaten Moscow's ability to maintain its influence in the North Caucasus republics. The threat even extends beyond the borders of Chechnya and Dagestan into the Russian heartland. The inability of Russian security forces to suppress extremist activities means that terrorist groups could have an unconstrained operational environment in which to plan and coordinate attacks. Tragedies such as the Beslan school massacre, Moscow's

Domodedovo airport bombing, Moscow's Dubrovka Theater hostage crisis and multiple rail-way and subway bombings are a testament to the threat posed by Islamic terrorism in Russia, terrorism that results from the growth of Islamic radicalism within Russia's borders. The Putin administration has been addressing this issue since 1999, but current trends indicate that the problem is not going to disappear on its own.

Chapter Four

The Russo-Georgian war of 2008 was a significant geo-political event in several key ways. First, it was the first time that post-Soviet Russia engaged in an overt military intervention against a sovereign nation. Second, it was, in a way, Russia's first military showdown against NATO, ironically occurring nearly seventeen years after the fall of the Soviet Union. Third, and perhaps most significantly of all, was that it took the question of Russian interests in the Caucasus out of isolation as Russia's internal affair and brought it out into the broader context of Russia's role in international affairs. The Russo-Georgian war affected not just how Russia defines its role in the Caucasus, but also how it defines its role in international affairs, particularly in Eastern Europe and what Moscow considers to be its back-yard.

THE ROAD TO WAR

Late in the evening of August 7th 2008, Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili ordered his army to stop a column of Russian armored vehicles coming through the Roki tunnel toward the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali (Asmus, 2010, 18). As far as the Western media outlets were concerned, this action marked the beginning of the 2008 Russo-Georgian war. For Russia, the ostensible reason for its actions was to protect its peacekeeping forces and citizens from "Georgian Aggression" (Kireyev, 2010, 95). For many Western observers, Russia's invasion was aimed at thwarting Georgia's bid to join NATO, derailing President Saakashvili's course of westernization and possibly causing his political demise. However, the roots of the conflict actually extended back nearly two decades before overt hostilities broke out between Georgia and Russia.

After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia did not abandon efforts to maintain its influence in its near abroad. The turmoil that gripped Georgia in the early 1990s made it virtually necessary for Russia to intervene if it were to maintain its role as the regional hegemon (Cornell/Starr/Gordadze, 2009, 29). In the early post-Soviet period, the Georgian nationalist leader, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, emerged as the leader of Georgia. Gamsakhurdia's rallying slogan of "Georgia for Georgians" in the early 1990s was troublesome because Georgia is home to a number of ethnicities and especially because of the autonomous areas of South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Adjara (Cornell/Starr/Goltz, 2009, 16-17). His nationalist tone along with his approach to the separatist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia alarmed Russia and led to ethnic division and ultimately civil war (Cornell/Starr/Goltz, 2009, 16-17). Russian policy makers at the time regarded him as anti-Russian and a threat to Russian hegemony in the Caucasus (Cornell/Starr/Gordadze, 2009, 30). It should come as no surprise then, that the coup that ousted him from power received substantial financial and technical support from the Russian government (Cornell/Starr/Gordadze, 2009, 30). Despite Russia's involvement in Gamsakhurdia's removal from power, his replacement would perhaps prove even more troublesome to Russian interests than Gamsakhurdia did. In fact, it was Eduard Shevardnadze, former Soviet minister of foreign affairs under Gorbachev and Yeltsin, who would start Georgia down the path that would eventually lead to war with Russia.

Just as Russian intervention into Georgian affairs did not begin in 2008, neither did Georgia's NATO aspirations and Western affinity begin with Saakashvili. The path to Westernization and the parting of ways with Russia started with Eduard Shevardnadze, his immediate predecessor. The first signs of trouble between Georgia and its big neighbor to the north came during the second Chechen war. At the onset of the second

Chechen War, Russia requested that Georgia allow Russian fighter jets to use its airspace and to allow Russian troops to control the Georgian/Chechen border on the Georgian side (Cornell/Starr/Gordadze, 2009, 41) Shevardnadze refused, which caused Putin to become furious and accuse him of aiding the Chechens and allowing them to use Georgia's Pankisi Gorge as a transit corridor (Cornell/Starr/Gordadze, 2009, 41). During this timeframe, Georgia would also become the focal point for tensions between Russia and the West, as the U.S. took an apparent interest in seeing Russian influence diminished in Georgia. In 1999, the Shevardnadze government announced that it would close Russian military bases on Georgian territory. At this stage, it became apparent that Georgia was courting Western alliances. The U.S. Secretary of Defense at the time, William Cohen, offered to help Russia cover the cost of the base closures, a proposition that was coldly received in Moscow (Cornell/Starr/Gordadze, 2009, 44). The closing of Russian bases on Georgian territory would have "ended nearly two centuries of Russian military presence there" (Cornell/Starr/Gordadze, 2009, 44). Russia responded to Shevardnadze's decision by imposing visa requirements on the Georgian diaspora living in Russia (Cornell/Starr/Gordadze, 2009, 44). This move was ostensibly aimed at staunching the flow of terrorists from Georgia into the North Caucasus. However, most terrorists were moving in from Central Asia and the more likely goal of the visa requirement was to impede the transfer of remittances from Russia to Georgia, which the Russian government believed formed the basis of the Georgian economy (Cornell/Starr/Gordadze, 2009, 45).

It would seem that the Russian government overestimated the size of the Georgian diaspora in Russia and the impact of remittances on the Georgian economy (Cornell/Starr/Gordadze, 2009, 45). It is interesting to note, though, that the Russian government exempted Abkhazians and North Ossetians from the visa requirement. If the

visa requirement were truly intended as a security measure, then surely South Ossetia and Abkhazia would have had to be handled in the same manner as Georgia. The fact that Abkhazia and South Ossetia were exempted from the visa requirement may have indicated that, even in 1999, Russia intended to challenge Georgia's territorial integrity and perhaps even annex the two regions (Cornell/Starr/Gordadze, 2009, 45). By 2002, Georgia had become the recipient of large sums of money as well as military equipment and advisors from the U.S., a move that could have only further alienated Tbilisi from Moscow (Cornell/Starr/Gordadze, 2009, 41). It became apparent that the U.S. had taken an interest in Georgia's military affairs, which was a development that likely caused Russian policy analysts about to worry about Western intentions on Russia's borders as well as what Georgia might do with a beefed-up military in regards to South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Russia's incessant allegations that the Pankisi Gorge had become a safe haven for Chechen terrorists and Al Qaida operatives piqued U.S. interest in the region.

In April, 2002 the U.S. started its Georgia Train and Equip (GTEP) mission, which provided Georgia with military equipment and advisors (Cornell/Starr/Gordadze, 2009, 43). Diplomatically, the mission put Russia in a tight spot. It didn't want a large U.S. military presence on its borders, but it could not publicly object to an operation directed against terrorists who were operating against Russia in Chechnya (Cornell/Starr/Gordadze, 2009, 43). Georgia's cooperation with the Americans combined with the ouster of the Russian military presence to form a deep resentment and distrust of Shevardnadze in Moscow (Cornell/Starr/Gordadze, 2009, 43). Therefore, it would be a mistake to assume that the troubles between Georgia and Russia started with Saakashvili. The theory that Saakashvili inherited Georgia's issues with Russia from Shevardnadze serves as a counterbalance to the claim that personality conflicts between Saakashvili and Putin determined the course of Russo-Georgian relations (Cornell/Starr/Gordadze, 2009,

47). Despite the Kremlin's problems with Shevardnadze however, it decided to support him during the 2003 so-called Rose Revolution, which brought Mikheil Saakashvili to power. The Rose revolution was one of the liberal democratic movements that took root in former Soviet states in the first few years of the twenty first century. These movements were generally identified by a color associated with them, such as the Orange Revolution that brought Yulia Tymoshenko to power in Ukraine. Vladimir Putin viewed these democratic movements as an illegitimate "grafting" of Western style democracy onto former Soviet states, claiming that Western liberal democracy would not work outside of the West (Cornell/Starr/Gordadze, 2009, 46). For Russia, having a doubtful leader in Georgia was preferable to having another "color revolution" on its borders, which Putin viewed as an undue imposition of Western influence onto the Russian periphery (Cornell/Starr/Gordadze, 2009, 46).

There is evidence that Russia began planning for a war in Georgia well before the Rose Revolution and the ascent of Saakashvili's Western style reform agenda. Ronald Asmus points out that the August 2008 war was "but the final act in a longer, complicated drama" and that it was "a culmination of a broader Russian strategy of rollback, fueled by rising nationalism, and petrodollars, and designed to reestablish its dominance over its neighbors" (9). Andrei Illarionov, author of the essay "The Russian Leadership's Preparation for War, 1999-2008" (2009), makes the case that the Russian government had been preparing for war with Georgia since at least 1999 and implies that the reason may have been to prevent a solid, independent and stable Georgian state (Cornell/Starr/Illarionov, 2009, 49-50). Much of this evidence manifests itself in the heavy Russian involvement with the separatist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which seemed heavily weighted toward supporting the separatist leaders and preventing any sort of reconciliation with Georgia (Cornell/Starr/Illarionov, 2009, 49-50).

In February 2003 the Russian government supplied South Ossetia with military equipment including twelve T-55 tanks, indicating that Russia may have already chosen a course of military action in Georgia (Cornell/Starr/Illarionov, 2009, 50). Russia seemed to deepen its commitment to a military resolution of the separatist question when, in early summer of 2004, it supplied seventy five T-72 tanks to South Ossetia (Cornell/Starr/Illarionov, 2009, 50). The delivery of military equipment to South Ossetia may have also been the Russian government's response to Georgia's acceptance of American military aid in the form of the GTEP. According to Volkhonsky and Mukhanov, there was concern in the Russian government that Georgia, with Western support, would launch a military campaign to reunite the separatist regions by force (386). Apart from the delivery of military equipment to South Ossetia, there is further evidence that Russia manipulated the separatist regions in order to prevent reintegration with Georgia. For example, Ludvig Chibirov, the president of South Ossetia from 1996-2001, had cooperated with the Georgian government and had signed the Baden Document, a document that would have put Georgia and South Ossetia on the path to a peaceful coexistence (Cornell/Starr/Illarionov, 2009, 52). However, in 2001, the Russian government helped to engineer the election of its own candidate, Edward Koikoty, a former South Ossetian trade representative to Moscow, business man and professional wrestler (Cornell/Starr/Illarionov, 2009, 52 and Asmus, 2010, 73). Additionally, former KGB officials had taken over as many of Koikoty's key ministers (Asmus, 2010, 78). Russia also managed to install its own people in key positions within the Abkhazian separatist government as well (Asmus, 2010, 78). Furthermore, in 2002, the South Ossetian parliament, at Koikoty's behest, voted to request recognition as an independent state by Moscow. As further evidence that Russia manipulated affairs in the separatist regions, Dmitry Sanakoyev, who served as the Prime Minister of South Ossetia, was

pushed out of office by Koikoty and the Russian government after he advocated dialogue and reconciliation with Tbilisi (Asmus, 2010, 82). Koikoty's play for Russian recognition of the South Ossetian state derailed the peace process started by Chibirov and Shevardnadze (Cornell/Starr/Illarionov, 2009, 53).

Moscow may have also intended that the control that it exerted over these two regions be used as leverage in its dealings with Georgia and the West. As evidence of Russia's manipulation of the separatist provinces, Putin once offered Saakashvili his help in resolving the North Ossetian and Abkhazian questions in exchange for Saakashvili abandoning his "westernization" policies (Asmus, 2010, 71). He also threatened to "take them away from Tbilisi" if the Georgian president did not agree to Putin's demands (Asmus, 2010, 71). Putin even reportedly told U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice that Russia would use military force and recognize both republics if Georgia made any moves to integrate them (Asmus, 2010, 74). For his part, Saakashvili attached great importance to the reunification of these two provinces, a position that probably ceded Russia the power to use them as leverage. After all, if reunification was not such a priority, Russia's threats to keep them away from Georgia - perhaps even permanently - would not have been a reason for so much concern (Asmus, 2010, 74).

During 2002, Russia had been increasing its pressure on Georgia and strengthening its ties with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Putin attempted to have Georgia declared a terrorist threat and wanted to invoke UN Article 51, the right of national self-defense, to authorize the use of force against Georgia (Cornell/Starr/Illarionov, 2009, 53). Russia also re-opened the rail line between Abkhazia and Russia, which had been shut down by the Confederation of Independent States (CIS) presidents in 1996 (Cornell/Starr/Illarionov, 2009, 53). In February of 2003, Russia again sent heavy military equipment to South Ossetia, this time in the vicinity of Java, where international

observers could not go due to lack of access (Cornell/Starr/Illarionov, 2009, 54). This action provided further indication that Moscow was either contemplating military action in Georgia at the time or was fortifying separatist militias in order to prevent reintegration. Late in 2003, as the Rose Revolution forced the resignation of Shevardnadze and ushered Mikheil Saakashvili into office, the Russian government began preparations for its "passportization" of thousands of South Ossetian and Abkhazian citizens (Cornell/Starr/Illarionov, 2009, 55). This policy, which eventually created the pretext for military action in Georgia, would later be declared "illegal" and "an open challenge to Georgian sovereignty" by the European Union's Tagliavani Report (Asmus, 2010, 42). Starting in May of 2004 Russia intensified its military cooperation with South Ossetia and accelerated its distribution of passports (Cornell/Starr/Illarionov, 2009, 56-57). By summertime, tensions between South Ossetia and Georgia boiled over and erupted into violence, which resulted in the deaths of nineteen Georgians and five Ossetians (Cornell/Starr/Illarionov, 2009, 56-57). It is important to note that, during this time, Russia supported the South Ossetian militias with arms, equipment, and military advisors amidst calls that Russia defend its citizens in South Ossetia (Cornell/Starr/Illarionov, 2009, 56-57). A Russian television news anchor even made a seemingly prophetic statement when he said: "We've organized a trap for the Georgians. This time, it seems, they've walked into it" (Cornell/Starr/Illarionov, 2009, 56-57).

For a brief time it looked as if there might be a bright spot in relations between Putin and Saakashvili. As Adjara underwent an upheaval similar to the Rose Revolution, the Russian government decided not to intervene on President Aslan Abashidze's behalf. As Abashidze departed Batumi on a Russian plane, Saakashvili personally thanked Putin for his support in resolving the crisis (Cornell/Starr/Illarionov, 2009, 55). However, Putin received Saakashvili's gratitude coolly, reminding the Georgian president that he

should not expect any such support in the affairs of South Ossetia and Abkhazia (Cornell/Starr/Illarionov, 2009, 55).

In May of 2005 the Russia Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, signed an agreement specifying a timeline for the agreed upon withdrawal of Russian troops and bases in Georgia (Cornell/Starr/Illarionov, 2009, 59-60). At the same time, however, the Russian government was making plans to increase its troop presence and build new bases in the two separatist provinces (Cornell/Starr/Illarionov, 2009, 59-60). By 2006 Russian deliveries of military aid and equipment to the two provinces had reached unprecedented proportions, to the point where military arms, equipment and personnel had surpassed those of Georgia's (Cornell/Starr/Illarionov, 2009, 59-60). It had become clear by this point that Russo-Georgian relations were rapidly deteriorating. Saakashvili was pressing ahead with his reform agenda and was not responding to Pressure from Moscow (Cornell/Starr/Illarionov, 2009, 64). A further step toward preparing for aggression on Georgia was taken in January 2007 when Putin, under the pretext of protesting the planned NATO missile shield in Poland and the Czech Republic, signed an order stating that Russia would withdraw from the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty. The withdrawal had the effect of removing any legal limit to the amount of forces that Russia could station in South Ossetia or Abkhazia (Cornell/Starr/Illarionov, 2009, 66). In September of 2007, the Georgian security forces had uncovered a Russian spy ring and had arrested four Russian agents operation in Georgia. Even though Georgian officials released the spies, Russia embarked on a large scale anti-Georgian campaign that subjected Georgian diplomats and citizens in Russia to harassment and discrimination and even enacted a unilateral embargo against Georgia that even included the severing of postal ties between the two countries (Cornell/Starr/Illarionov, 2009, 61-63).

Georgia's drive for integration into NATO and the EU eventually took its toll and propelled it into war with Russia. On 21 March 2008 the Russian Duma passed a resolution recommending that the government of Russia take whatever means may be necessary to ensure the safety of Russian citizens and the sovereignty of South Ossetia and Abkhazia should Georgia take any action to bring the two regions under its control or to join NATO (Volkhonsky/Mukhanov, 2009, 387). This resolution indicates that Russian officials viewed the prospect of Georgian NATO membership as a serious enough threat to warrant a preemptive strike.

THE KOSOVO PRECEDENT OR RUSSIA "STANDS UP" TO NATO

It is evident that the Russia's military intervention was directed not just against Georgia, but NATO as well. As Ronald Asmus points out; "Moscow's goal was to kill any chance of NATO ever expanding into Georgia or anywhere else along its borders and to dissuade other neighboring countries from getting too close to the West" (5). From this perspective, Russia's military campaign was a power play aimed at preserving the geo-political integrity of its "near abroad." It was also important, from the Kremlin's perspective, that it maintain control of its neighbors in the Caucasus in order to keep NATO (and the West in general) at bay as well as to consolidate control of Caucasus and Caspian oil (Asmus, 2010, 5). The desire to keep NATO out of the Caucasus and, therefore, Georgia out of NATO, may have been partially borne of economic and geo-political considerations. The export of energy plays a vital role in Russia's foreign policy and the presence of a Western alliance such as NATO in the Caucasus/Black Sea region could impede Russia's ability to consolidate control over the export of Caspian Sea oil (Asmus, 2009, 9). In his essay for the English language Russian publication, *International Affairs* (2010), Mr. Kireyev states his opinion that the Western powers were

conspiring to deprive Russia of access to Caspian oil and natural gas resources and thus NATO posed a significant threat to Russian interests in the Caucasus (95-96).

However, the bulk of the literature indicates that the campaign to keep NATO from acquiring Georgia as an ally had more to do with foreign relations and Russia's place at the table of European international politics. In the winter of 2008, the leading nations in the European Union and NATO pushed for the international recognition of Kosovo as an independent state (Asmus, 2010, 103). The Western powers pushed ahead with their support of Kosovar independence against the objections of Russia (Asmus, 2010, 103). The recognition of Kosovo meant that Russia and, in particular, Vladimir Putin, had been slighted in the arena of European politics, and in a region where Russia had historically and traditionally enjoyed a great deal of influence (Asmus, 2010, 103). The Kosovo affair would prove to have serious ramifications for Georgia. The NATO intervention in Kosovo nearly a decade earlier had been viewed by Moscow as Western interference in what should have been Russia's privileged sphere of influence (Asmus, 2010, 103). The recognition of Kosovo, therefore, presented a challenge that Russia had to answer.

Taken together with the move to bring Ukraine and Georgia into NATO, Russia viewed the Kosovo affair as an open challenge to Russian interests and an attempt to pressure Russia into acquiescing to Western agendas. Russia, in the opinion of the authors, had to react lest the "politics of pressure become validated" (Volkhonsky/Mukhanov, 2009, 385). Vladimir Putin once said as much to Mikheil Saakashvili himself. In a meeting of CIS states in February 2008, Putin told Saakashvili that Georgia would be "part of the answer" for Kosovo (Asmus, 2010, 105-106). Putin intended to expand diplomatic and economic relations with South Ossetia and Abkhazia and lift the CIS embargo (Asmus, 2010, 105-106). Thus, the Kosovo affair seems to

have caused immense mischief in the affair between Georgia, Russia and the two separatist regions.

In addition to recognizing Kosovo, NATO may have given Russia further impetus to intervene in South Ossetia and Abkhazia by agreeing that Georgia (and Ukraine as well) would eventually be admitted to the alliance at the Bucharest summit in April, 2008 (Volkhonsky/Mukhanov, 2009, 394 and Asmus, 2010, 111). The Kosovo precedent gave South Ossetia and Abkhazia ammunition in their bid for recognition. It also gave Russia the excuse it was looking for to intervene in the issue and frustrate Georgia's unification attempts. In the words of Volkhonsky and Mukhanov in their publication for the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2009); "it [the recognition of Kosovo] became a serious blow to Georgia's demand that Abkhazia and South Ossetia be returned to Georgia's jurisdiction" (384). This precedent, combined with the manufacturing of Russian citizens these areas through passport distribution, had the effect of taking them away from Georgia for the foreseeable future. For its part, the Russian government seems to have understood that the unilateral recognition of the two regions could be risky in that it did not legally change their status and violated the norms of the United Nations concerning the internal affairs of sovereign nations (Volkhonsky/Mukhanov, 2009, 385). However, given its concerns that Saakashvili may have been planning to reintegrate the separatist regions by force, the Russian government may have viewed the risk as necessary.

The stage had been set. With South Ossetia and Abkhazia technically (at least in Russia's eyes) sovereign states and with thousands of its citizens now living there, the Russian government practically had complete freedom of action concerning the two provinces. Thus, when Georgian forces attempted to stop a column of Russian armored vehicles coming through the Roki Tunnel, Russia could claim that Georgia was attacking a sovereign state and the Russian citizens living there. Volkhonsky and Mukhanov make

Russia's position and intentions clear concerning August 2008; having recognized the two republics, Russia took the position that it had the duty to defend them against Georgian aggression (389). It was clear that the NATO intervention on Kosovo's behalf was not lost on Moscow. Russia justified their action in Georgia along the same moral and ideological lines that the U.S. and NATO had used for its action against Milosevic, i.e., that it was a peacekeeping operation aimed at preventing ethnic cleansing and genocide (Asmus, 2010, 108-109). Furthermore, Russia even made its intentions clear to the West that part of the reason for the invasion was to "destroy Georgia's chances of ever joining NATO (Asmus, 2010, 108-109).

THE FALL-OUT

Approximately one month before the outbreak of open hostilities between Russia and Georgia, a Russian SU-25 flew over the skies of South Ossetia. The Russian government claimed that the purpose of the flight was to "cool hot heads in Tbilisi" and to prevent a general degradation of relations with Georgia (Volkhonsky/Mukhanov, 2009, 389-390). The show of force was, therefore, intended to be a deterrent to Saakashvili's course of reintegration and westernization. Apparently, the "hot heads" did not cool off and one month later, Russian and Georgian forces were in a state of open conflict. After only a few days of fighting, French President Nicolas Sarkozy began to work out a cease fire agreement between the two sides. Although the cease fire managed to save Tbilisi, it failed to establish a favorable outcome for Georgia with regards to South Ossetian and Abkhazian reintegration (Asmus, 2010, 220-221). The European Union's Tagliavani Report was not conclusively favorable to one side or the other (Asmus, 2010, 220-221). It did acknowledge that Moscow's recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia was illegal as was its policy of distributing passports in these two provinces in order to manufacture

Russian citizens (Asmus, 2010, 220-221). It also refuted Russia's claim of entering South Ossetia out of humanitarian reasons (Asmus, 2010, 220-221). However, the same report placed the blame for opening hostilities on Georgia and acknowledged "the Russian right to defend its so-called peacekeepers" in South Ossetia (Asmus, 2010, 220-221). Under the circumstances of the ceasefire agreement, Russia could still maintain a considerable military presence in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, a factor that not only places reintegration out of reach for the time being, but also means that Georgia still lives under the threat of a renewed military confrontation (Asmus, 2010, 220-221).

CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER FOUR

Ronald Asmus contends that the 2008 war may have hurt Russia in the long run. For instance, one of the main goals of the war was to destroy the Saakashvili presidency, which is still intact of this writing (Asmus, 2010, 220). Furthermore, the war precipitated an outflow of capital from Western sources and damaged Russia's reputation (Asmus, 2010, 220). Rather than serving as warning to other former Soviet states that might harbor intentions to "go west", Russia's aggression in Georgia may encourage those countries to seek protection from the West (Asmus, 2010, 221). However, evidence that Russia has suffered as a result of the Georgian War is lacking. There have been neither military nor economic sanctions against Russia as a result of the war.

While it is true that the GTEP is still in effect, the scope of the project has been limited to assisting the Georgian armed forces with strictly non-combat capabilities. The U.S. government has stepped up efforts to improve relations with Russia since 2008 and has even re-committed to the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) and shelved the planned Eastern European NATO missile shield. With Russia supplying such a large portion of Europe's fossil fuel energy, relations with Western Europe are unlikely to

break down. Neither is Russia likely to suffer much economically considering its status as the one of the world's leading oil producers. Also, since the war, no other former Soviet or Eastern Bloc country has shown any inclination to join NATO or seek other Western alliances. Since 2004, when the Baltic States were admitted, the only other former Soviet republic besides Georgia that has shown an interest in NATO membership was Ukraine, which abandoned its Westernization course after the reversal of the Orange Revolution in 2010. It would seem that Russia got most of what it wanted out of the war while avoiding any serious repercussions from the international community.

If Russia viewed the Georgia affair as a matter of establishing its hegemony in the region and defending it from encroaching Western influences and a hostile government on its borders, then Russia won a clear victory over Georgia and the West. The 2008 war essentially dealt a serious blow to Georgia's prospects of joining NATO. It cast the threat of a serious degradation in Russian/U.S. relations were NATO to make any further ingresses into what Russia considers to be its privileged sphere of influence. Furthermore, it effectively took South Ossetia and Abkhazia away from Tbilisi just as Putin had threatened and prevented reintegration for the foreseeable future (Asmus, 2010, 71). Although the war did not succeed in destroying Saakashvili's political career, it effectively marginalized his foreign policy and prevented him from taking actions and forming alliances that do not meet the Kremlin's approval. In this case, Moscow proved its ability to exert its influence on Georgia and its separatist provinces whether Georgia was amenable to it or not.

Chapter Five

Considering Russia's turbulent past in the Caucasus as well as some of the recent history and current events, the question of Russia's future in the Caucasus should be examined. The government of Russia may yet face significant challenges in the North Caucasus. Combating terrorism, criminality, and poor economic conditions in Dagestan and Chechnya diverts a significant amount of money, personnel, and resources to the region and progress often proves to be elusive. Furthermore, strong separatist and radical Islamist elements are still operating in Chechnya and Dagestan despite two wars to keep Chechnya in the federation and quell radical Islamist movements. It is unlikely, given the blood and treasure expended to keep Chechnya in the federation, that Chechnya will be allowed to secede. But the Russian government will have to take measures to improve the security and economic situation in the region and stem the creeping Islamization that is slowly taking root in Chechnya and Dagestan. Despite the outcome of the 2008 Russo-Georgian conflict, which resulted in South Ossetia and Abkhazia remaining frozen conflict zones and allowed Russia to maintain forces in the two provinces, Georgia has still not abandoned its aspirations of joining NATO and the European Union. However, the conflict should have made it abundantly clear that Russia will not allow Georgia to exit its sphere of influence and continue on its path of westernization. Although the prospect of Georgia entering the NATO alliance is still not technically off the table, it is a prospect that seems increasingly unlikely to become reality.

THE QUESTION OF INDEPENDENCE AND THE RISE OF RADICAL ISLAM

At no point since the end of the Soviet Union has the Russian government given any indication that it intends to part with any of its republics in the North Caucasus. The

significant expense and effort that the Russian government expended to maintain its influence in the region indicate that it intends to not only keep Chechnya in the federation, but to ensure that it is fully integrated into Russian society - culturally, socially, and economically. However, despite Moscow's success in preventing secession and even bringing about economic improvement in places like Chechnya, there still remain some indicators that parts of the region may be slipping away from Moscow's influence.

As was mentioned in Chapter Three, one of the most troubling factors for Moscow concerning the North Caucasus is the rise of radical Islam in republics such as Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia. Not only does the rise of Islamic radicalism pose the threat of increased terrorism within Russia, it can lead to renewed movements for secession. For example, the tenets of fundamentalist Islam require people to live under Sharia law, which is currently not recognized as a form of government in Russia. According to an Islamic spiritual leader in the Dagestani village of Novosasitli, Dagestan would have to break away from Russia in order to implement Sharia law ("From Moscow to Mecca"). Furthermore, there is evidence that Chechnya may be slipping further away from Moscow and down the path of fundamental Islam. Indeed, Grozny today would appear to be a success story for Moscow's policies in Chechnya. The republic's capital today exhibits many signs of economic prosperity; skyscrapers, cafes, movie theaters, and safe, clean streets ("The Islamic Republic"[ix]). Grozny was named representative modern city of the Soviet Union in 1990 and it would seem that it is once again a model modern city. But despite the best efforts of President Kadyrov and the Russian government to suppress religious extremists, Chechnya has been experiencing a "creeping Islamization" including restrictions on the sale of alcohol, dress codes for women and the reappearance of polygamy, much of it with Kadyrov's tacit support (Ibid). The rise of Islamic

radicalism is not limited to Chechnya or Dagestan either. An article from Russia's *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* reported that as of March of last year, Russian security forces were working hard to combat terrorist groups in Kabardino-Balkaria, Ingushetia, and North Ossetia as well as in Dagestan and Chechnya ("Дагестан"[x]). The report not only indicates the spread of Islamic radicalism over the entire region, but also the movement to establish a caliphate in the North Caucasus. Although the establishment of such a caliphate is not likely to succeed, the movement indicates a movement to break away from the Russian government's control and to reject the mainstream of Russian society. As Joshua Yaffa points out in his article, "Has Russia Brought Terrorism on Itself?," (2011) the militant Islamism in the North Caucasus today represents a "counter society," the goals of which are not just to break away from Russian rule, but also to rid their society of the influences of Russian culture such as the presence of movie theaters and the use of alcohol. The militants also target their local leaders, many of whom were installed by Moscow and are considered by the militants to be "corrupt and un-Islamic".[xi] Another symptom of the separation from the traditional institutions that associated with Russian influence is the growing divide between Sufism and Salafism. The movement to Salafism signifies a break from the traditional form of Islam in the North Caucasus to the more fundamentalist version commonly found in the Middle East. The reason: Sufism is viewed as the institutional form of Islam and its practitioners, who hold most of the power in the North Caucasus, are viewed by many as being associated with the brutality and corruption that are endemic in the region ("From Moscow to Mecca").

The rise in Islamic radicalism may have been fueled by the Russian Federation government's own policies in the region. Despite the relative prosperity of Grozny today, poor economic development and high unemployment continue to vex much of the North Caucasus region. Many of the local government institutions and leaders are

corrupt and incompetent and unemployment can be between fifty and seventy percent in some areas ("Has Russia Brought Terrorism on Itself?"). This sort of poverty and despair has been shown to have a radicalizing effect, particularly on young men with no job and no way of supporting their families. In addition to the disintegrating economies and state and social structures, the other main radicalizing influence in the North Caucasus is the heavy handed counter-terrorism and policing tactics both from federal and local authorities. "Indiscriminate crackdowns," harassment, and even "extrajudicial killings" are all characteristic of the efforts to combat militant Islam in the region; however, it is evident that such tactics have only served to further radicalize elements of the population and to push otherwise peaceful citizens over to the side of the radicals (Ibid). An editorial article from *The Economist* entitled "Islam Inflamed" (2011)[xii] contends that that there is a rising Islamic radicalization in the Northern Caucasus, especially in Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia. The reason for the rise in radicalism, according to the editors, is that the government in Moscow has not come up with anything approaching a coherent plan to build infrastructure or implement good working governance. Instead, it has responded primarily by the use of brute force and throwing money at the problem. In accordance with Yaffa's contention concerning government brutality and corrupt local officials, the brute force only serves to exacerbate the problem of radicalization and the money intended to solve the problems merely disappears into a pit of corruption ("Islam Inflamed")

The problem as it may be viewed from Moscow's perspective is not so much that one of the North Caucasus republics might declare and achieve independence, but rather that the political and social fabric of those republics might completely disintegrate. For instance, Dagestani society the districts are governed by local "strong men" with the backing of the local police and religious leaders ("From Moscow to Mecca"). Since the

president of Dagestan, Magomedsalam Magomedov, was appointed by Moscow without the strongmen's approval, he is viewed by many to be a puppet of Moscow without any real legitimacy as a leader (Ibid).

> As a powerful regional leader, Mr. Umakhanov sneers at Magomedsalam Magomedov, who was appointed Dagestan's president without consultation with local strongmen. "He is not an independent player. The oligarchs in Moscow interfere in his decisions." The scrapping of regional elections by Mr. Putin in 2004 has eliminated peaceful channels for political competition, only making places like Dagestan more explosive. Mr. Umakhanov says the only way out of this paralysis is direct elections. He is not alone in feeling that way. Most Russians want to elect their regional governors. This is precisely what the Kremlin fears, as it would mean the loss of guaranteed political support from puppets in the regions ("From Moscow to Mecca").

The above passage is illustrative of the Kremlin's "Chechenization" policy, according to which the Russian government installs its own approved local leaders to govern provinces in the North Caucasus in order to keep them close to Moscow (Ibid). At the very least, the situation detailed above calls into question the effectiveness of the "Chechenization" policy as a means of bringing lasting peace and stability to the region. The perceived illegitimacy of the Russian government's proxy leaders in the North Caucasus is a problem it will have to address.

SECURITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS

The security situation in places such as Dagestan, Ingushetia and Chechnya remains tenuous. Terrorism and violent criminal activity are a part of daily life

throughout much of the North Caucasus. The Russian army and the Interior Ministry security troops remain very busy in their efforts to contain the violence from terrorists and armed bandits. For example, in the first half of the year 2011, the Dagestani Interior Ministry reported forty six bombings and suicide attacks, which claimed the lives of twenty six people and injured sixty four more ("Дагестан"[xiii]). The situation has prompted the Russian government to transfer police and security forces from Chechnya to Dagestan (Ibid). These statistics were reported in an article in Russia's *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (2012), which likened the situation in Dagestan to that of the Gaza Strip. Additionally, there was a clash between an armed "illegal militia group" and Russian security forces along the Chechen-Dagestani border as recently as 10 October 2012 that resulted in the hospitalization of one Russian soldier ("На границе Чечни и Дагестана"[xiv]).

One particularly poignant reminder of the atmosphere of violence and fear in the region came in the form of the abduction and murder of the Chechen journalist and human rights advocate, Natalia Estemirova. Estemirova spent much of her career chronicling the stories of ordinary Chechens who became victims of the wars and of the security forces' brutality ("And Then There Were None"[xv]). However, in July of 2009, she was abducted in front of her apartment building in broad daylight (Ibid). Later that day her body was found with evidence that she had been beaten and then executed with four gun shots, "two in the chest and two in the head" (Ibid). There was no mention of any suspects, but this murder stands out in its similarity to the murder of Russian journalist, Anna Politkovskaya in 2006.

The murder of Estemirova highlights another source of the troubles in the North Caucasus: the local security apparatuses bear some of the responsibility for the violence. In Chechnya in particular, human rights advocates are often harassed or targeted for

violence. An article posted in *Кавказский узел* (2012) covers the lack of any plausible investigation into the murder of Natalia Estemirova even though three years have passed since the incident (Gantimurova, 2012). This same article uncovers the targeting of human rights advocates and sympathetic journalists. The author asserts that the government, instead of investigating and prosecuting these incidents, harasses the activists and journalists. Authorities in Chechnya consider Estemirova's murder a closed case and blame it on Chechen insurgents (Gantimurova, 2012). However, the case has not been brought to trial and the author and groups such as Human Rights Watch do not find this to be a plausible explanation (Gantimurova, 2012). The Estemirova case indicates just how difficult it is becoming for human rights activists and journalists in places like Chechnya and Dagestan.

These individuals may be attacked with relative impunity, while the authorities do little to protect them or investigate the attacks. In her article, Gantimurova does not seem to accuse the Russian government of actually conducting attacks, only of not bothering to prosecute the criminals responsible for them, thereby implying a tacit support for them. The evidence shows that the human rights atmosphere in the North Caucasus can only contribute to unrest among the population. This unrest could make it increasingly difficult for the Russian government to maintain its influence in the region.

GEORGIA

The question of Georgia's NATO membership may pose (at least from Moscow's perspective) the greatest threat to Russian hegemony in the region. When President Saakashvili embarked on his course of Westernization, NATO membership was a key component of those plans. The Russian administration tried very hard indeed to prevent having another NATO member state on its borders. Its efforts included manipulating the

separatist provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and culminated in military intervention in August of 2008 (Asmus, 2010, 217). The 2008 Russo-Georgian war was, according to Western sources such as Asmus, Starr, and Cornell, aimed at preventing Georgia from becoming a part of the alliance. Russia's desire to keep Georgia out of NATO is twofold and complimentary. On the one hand, Vladimir Putin seems determined to prevent any further NATO encroachment into what he views as Russia's privileged sphere of influence. On the other hand, Georgia's entrance into NATO and the European Union would mean its exit from the Russian sphere of influence. The 2008 war was as much a warning to the West as it was punishment for Georgia (Asmus, 2010, 221). Therefore, the question of Georgian NATO membership goes beyond the scope of a dispute between Russia and Georgia over alliances. It concerns Russia's place in global politics as a prominent world power and a counterbalance to U.S. led Western coalitions. Given the importance that Russia attaches to Georgia in this regard and the effort expended to keep it in Russia's orbit, it is unlikely that the Russian government will allow Georgia to exit the realm of Russian influence in favor of its new Western friends any time in the near future.

With these considerations in mind, there arises the question of Georgia's future as a sovereign nation able to govern affairs within its own borders and forge its own alliances. It is fairly clear that NATO and EU membership is shelved for the time being, but still not decided one way or the other. Furthermore, given that the European Union is burdened with debt crises in at least four of its member states, Brussels will likely be reluctant to accept any new members that lack robust infrastructures and economies. There also remains the issue of sovereignty for South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Although Russia and a small handful of other countries recognize their independence, the bulk of the international community considers them part of Georgia's sovereign territory, a

condition that practically relegates them to the status of quasi Russian colonies. The frosty relationship between Georgia and Russia, the unresolved question of NATO membership, and the unresolved status of the break-away regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia have placed Georgia in a state of limbo. Although it has a functioning government and a stable economy, Georgia does not have full sovereignty in that it cannot forge its own alliances without serious consequences. Furthermore, it has two provinces over which the government cannot exercise any control or influence. Finally, until there is a drastic regime change, Georgia will probably live under the threat of aggression from its powerful neighbor to the north, Russia. The recent victory of the oppositional Georgian Dream party in the April 2012 parliamentary elections may signal a significant change in Georgia's governance, but it is still too soon to tell.

As far as the future status of the separatist regions is concerned, reconciliation between Sukhumi, Tskhinvali and Tbilisi seems unlikely in the near future. In October of 2012, the twenty first round of discussions concerning the security and the political status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia began ("В Женеве начинается"[xvi]). Abkhazia in particular seems very keen on maintaining its status as an independent republic, even demanding its own official government representation at the talks (Ibid). The Abkhazian delegation also appears skeptical that the opposition party's victory in the Georgian parliamentary elections will bring about much change (Ibid). The South Ossetian delegation, however, seems to be taking a more cautiously optimistic approach, stating that it would be willing to work with the new government "depending on how they will build policy" (Ibid).

The reality of the Georgian situation seems to be that it will remain "frozen" in the state it was in following the 2008 war for a little while to come. It may be possible that the Georgian Dream Party will win the presidential election as well. If that is the

case, much will depend on whether the new government continues down the path on which Shevardnadze and Saakashvili put it or moves back toward Moscow. If the next Georgian government continues its Western aspirations it will almost certainly prolong tensions between Tbilisi and Moscow. However, if it reverses course and moves back toward Moscow, it would precipitate a thaw in Russo-Georgian relations, but it would signal the end of Saakashvili's reforms and the ultimate failure of Georgia's Western experiment.

CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER FIVE

The federal government of Russia does not show any inclination of allowing any of its North Caucasus republics to slip away from its grasp. The policies and police actions previously detailed bear testament to the Russian government's commitment to bringing stability to the North Caucasus region and keeping those republics as good, productive members of the Russian Federation. The targeting and harassment of journalists and human rights activists with the apparent tacit support of the Kremlin indicates that the Russian government is keenly interested in preventing dissent and unrest in the region and in ensuring that its governors stay in power as long as Moscow desires.

At least since 2010, one of the key areas of interest for the Russian government is improving the economic situation in the North Caucasus. Then-President Dmitrii Medvedev appointed Alexander Khloponin, former Siberian governor and business man, as the Kremlin's special envoy to the region (Yaffa[xvii]). His mission was to improve the economic and social situation in the region (Ibid). With the exception of Grozny, where the local economy seems to thrive in comparison to its neighboring towns, it appears that little progress has been made since 2010 (Parfitt[xviii]). This is not to say that the

government is not still trying to address economic issues and improve infrastructure in the North Caucasus. In July of 2011, the Russian government announced a plan to spend 3.89 trillion rubles on economic development in the region over the next thirteen years ("Russian Government Slashes Funding"[xix]). Although the actual amount will be roughly half of that number (1.7 trillion rubles or $52.2 billion), the expenditure on the region's behalf is significant and even includes earmarks to benefit those who lost their homes during the Chechen wars (Ibid). The plan of expenditure on the North Caucasus' development combined with the blood and treasure already spent on securing the region indicate that the Russian government has every intention of keeping these republics from slipping away or descending into chaos. Russia's actions indicate that it is trying very hard to suppress Islamic radicalism and to improve conditions so that young men do not turn to radicalism. It seems that its current approach of encouraging economic growth is the right policy. Improvements to the economy, unemployment, infrastructure and the overall quality of life in the North Caucasus republics must compliment efforts to improve security. Otherwise, places such as Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Chechnya will probably descend into a cycle of violence as security forces clash with extremist militias and poor economic and social conditions continue to swell the ranks the militias and terrorist cells.

As far as Georgia and the South Caucasus are concerned, Russian hegemony in the region can be considered secure for the time being. As discussed above, the prospect of Georgia exiting Russia's sphere of influence seems unlikely. The Putin government is firmly opposed to the prospect and, as was indicated in Chapter Four, the West is not likely to intervene on Georgia's behalf. For Saakashvili, there is the further problem that his party lost in the recent 2012 parliamentary elections. Perhaps the defeat was a repudiation of Saakashvili's policies and the direction in which he took the country.

Furthermore, the question of the separatist provinces remains unresolved and those conflicts remain frozen, which places the Georgian government in a difficult situation. Russia maintains the upper hand in regards to Georgia and it is ironic to consider that Russia's influence in the Caucasus seems to be more secure outside of its borders than within.

Conclusion

In the previous pages I have discussed Russia's role in the Caucasus and how its efforts to maintain its influence in the region have led to two protracted Chechen wars and a brief, but consequential conflict with Georgia. I briefly discussed the history of Russian involvement in the Caucasus region from the time of Peter the Great through the era of Gorbachev and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. A discussion of the history of Russia's involvement in the region highlights Russia's historical efforts to establish and maintain control of the region. A study of Russia's history in the Caucasus will inevitably reveal the struggle between those who endeavored to obtain independence from Russian rule and those who sought to maintain Russian hegemony in the region. I believe that such study will also reveal that the Chechen and Georgian wars do not merely represent the modern state of affairs in the region, but rather a continuation of this age old struggle.

I discussed the circumstances surrounding the two Chechen wars as well as the Yeltsin and Putin administrations' role in them. An in-depth study of this aspect of Russian history brings to light the relationship between the Russian government and the North Caucasus republics in the atmosphere of chaos and uncertainty in Russia following the breakup of the Soviet Union. In my discussion of the First Chechen War, I indicated that the Yeltsin administration's drive to keep Chechnya in the Russian Federation was rooted in the concern that Chechen independence would serve as the catalyst for a general dissolution of the Russian Federation. In this section I also discussed the Second Chechen War and how it differed from the first. The importance of this subject is that features the role of radical Islam and terrorism in the second war. The presence of radical

Islam and terrorism in the North Caucasus provided renewed impetus for the Putin government to keep the region under control and it provided a mandate for the use of military force as an anti-terrorism initiative. Furthermore, it allowed President Putin to define and justify the war in the context of the post-nine-eleven Global War on Terrorism.

I provided an analysis of the possible threats to Russian hegemony in the region and what the loss of hegemony would mean for the Russian Federation. This question addresses the issue of radical Islam in the North Caucasus, the effects of Chechnya's drive for independence, and the possibility of Georgia exiting Russia's sphere of influence and what the implications of a pro-Western Georgia might be. In researching these questions I found that there was actually little danger that the Chechen drive for independence would initiate a general wave of nationalist independence movements among the North Caucasus republics. It also appears that, due to a collusion of factors, Georgia will probably not enter the European Union or NATO in the near future. However, the presence of radical Islam in the North Caucasus may present not only a security threat for the Russia as a whole, but may also threaten to undermine the rule of Russian law in the region as Islamic communities within the North Caucasus republics break away from the Russian main stream, replacing Russian law with Sharia law and the Russian authorities for their own local leaders.

I discussed the underlying causes of the 2008 Russo-Georgian War and the war's implications for Georgia and Russia's role in the region. In this section I also discussed the conflict's implications for Russia's role in world politics, particularly in Eastern Europe. The military action on Russia's part was clearly aimed at securing Russian hegemony in the South Caucasus and preventing Georgia from developing close ties with Western alliances and organizations such as NATO and the European Union.

Furthermore, it appears that Russia used the Georgian conflict as means to openly challenge the further expansion of NATO onto Russia's borders and to assert its opposition to the expansion of American and Western influence into Eastern Europe.

Finally, I discussed the future of Russia's role in the Caucasus region, what should be done to ensure peace and stability in the Russian Federation's North Caucasus republics, and whether or not it will be feasible for Georgia to exit Russia's sphere of influence. I have found that it is not enough to simply continue military style anti-terrorism campaigns in the North Caucasus. A focus on promoting economic growth and improving infrastructure in the North Caucasus would be the best approach to compliment security efforts in the region. Furthermore, concerning Georgia, it seems unlikely that Georgia will be able to exit Russia's sphere of influence in the near future as long as Russian foreign policy is to maintain hegemony in the South Caucasus.

Overall, the Caucasus is a vitally important region that the Russian government cannot afford to let slip away. The Russian government's efforts to maintain its influence in the region, both inside and outside of Russian borders, have cost it great expense in blood and treasure. There may be the possibility that, through sound diplomacy and economic policy, Russian presence in the Caucasus region will not be marked by violence in the future. Even if that is not the case, however, Russia will still maintain a significant presence in the region, even if the cost is high. For over two centuries the Caucasus region has been as integral a part of Russia as any other of its regions and Russia will most likely ensure that it stays that way.

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[ix] See vi.
[x] See viii.
[xi] See v.
[xii] Editor. 2011. "Islam Inflamed." *The Economist*. url: http://www.economist.com/node/18530091.
[xiii] See viii.
[xiv] Editor. 2012 "На границе Чечни и Дагестана идет преследование группы предполагаемых боевиков." *Кавказский Узел*. url: http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/213944/
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[xviii] See vi.
[xix] Fuller, Liz. (2012). "Russian Government Slashes Funding for North Caucasus." *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*. url: http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-north-caucasus-funding-slashed-/24620406.html

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